Of Iron Stars and Men-of-War
by Lost to the Night

Summary

After being dropped off into a whole new universe, Tony is outraged by the sheer /inefficiency/ of the droids. And the warships? Please, he could improve the designs in his /sleep/.

-Because Tony Stark can do so much better.

Notes

I'm the designated 'family disappointment,' so don't keep your hopes up; I'm probably going to disappoint you guys sooner or later.

...I like reviews and conflicting opinions, and your "Kudos" cheer me up.

See the end of the work for more notes.
The portals that unintentionally popped up whenever the Infinity Gauntlet was used were now slowly dying down, collapsing one by one. Wanda eyed them in contempt. Stark had prattled on earlier about how the energy from all the stones being together at once exponentially increased each one's powers. It meant that unless the stones were separated, portals would inevitably continue to open.

Luckily, now that Thanos was defeated the stones were already in the process of being divided. Thor would be taking one (or was it two? Wanda didn't care for the politics behind it all). The Mind Stone was painstakingly being inserted into Vision's head. The Strange doctor was wearing one as a mere *trinket* around his neck. The aliens, Guardians of the Galaxy, apparently, were taking some to scatter about the universe.

A small portal, no bigger than her head, tore itself into existence not two feet in front of her. Wanda growled in annoyance and stopped, unwilling to walk into it. She flicked her hands, tossing some spare energy at it, but it was absorbed. The portal was colored with reddish hues, but it didn't disappear.

Wanda clenched her hands, forcing the portal smaller. It worked, but only for a second. It grew to the size of a small horse before becoming basketball-sized. Several more moments of concentration didn't seem to affect it as it widened enough for the Hulk to wriggle through, then small as her fist. Was it destabilizing?

Snorting in disgust, Wanda daintily stepped around the rapidly growing and shrinking portal and strolled to where Steve stood, anxiously running his hands down Bucky's ruined metal arm. For his part, Bucky looked uncomfortable at the attention, though not in any severe pain.

"Wanda, you're okay!" Clint exclaimed roughly from where he lay, bound to a medical stretcher. His leg, though slashed, had not been as critical as some of the other injuries that had been caused by the invasion. As such, after stopping the blood flow, the medics that had arrived at the conclusion of the battle had decided to leave him for more serious injuries. Clint, a true hero, hadn't protested.

"Of course I am," Wanda said, tossing her head back. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"I know, you were brilliant," Clint complimented, smiling proudly. It set off a warm glow in Wanda's chest. She smiled back happily. "Now, if only I could move my arm." He poked at his dirty sling.

A bright splash of red had her turning her head to the side.

"-it, Vis," Stark was muttering urgently, splaying his hands over Vision.

"Mr. Stark, I am *fine,*" Vision answered, a mere hint of exasperation coloring the last word. He reached up and, as Stark tensed, slowly grasped Stark's wrist and gently lowered it down.

Stark stared at where Vison's hand held his wrist, then moved his gaze up to Vision's eyes. Vis quirked his lips into a tiny smile, one that, though small, more resembled one of Stark's fake, showman smiles than the soft curl that Wanda had been teaching Vis before her departure from the Compound. Wanda glared, offended. Vis shouldn't be learning bad habits from someone dubbed the "Merchant of Death."
Stark and Vis examined each other for a long minute before Stark looked away with a shake of his head and a loud exhale. Wanda felt victorious on Vison's behalf.

"I know, I know. I just worry, though," Stark huffed. "That rhymes, in case you didn't catch it. You know, I really care. You're like the mutant lovechild I never knew I wanted to have in a threesome with JARVIS and Bruce. Not that I wanted to have a- you know what, never mind. Where's the Spider-kid? Oi, Underoos!" Stark abruptly turned on his heel and walked briskly away from the baffled but amused android.

Wanda squared her shoulders and lifted her chin as Stark approached. "Spiderman's that way," she said as neutrally as she could, pointing away from Steve and the others, hoping Stark would leave.

"Thanks, kid," Stark said, not even looking at her as he turned in the direction she indicated.

"I'm not a kid, murderer," Wanda returned, shoulders rising in antagonism.

"Rogers seems to think you are," Stark countered easily, ignoring the last part of her sentence and not bothering to look back. Though his voice was causal, gently teasing, almost, her powers told differently. Within him burned an icy aggression that mirrored her own fiery hostility with frightening clarity. In another life, they could have been the best of friends. "Though that seems to only count for when it comes time for taking responsibility. You know, accountability and all that? No?"

"What about you?" Wanda called, walking after him, not willing to let him get away with his hypocrisy. She glanced behind, but decided she didn't want anything to do with Clint's good-natured whining or Nat's calculating glances. And who knew where Sam was? Steve would finish his fussing momentarily, and she didn't want that attention on her. She wasn't a kid, after all...

"Me?" Stark turned, raising his arms up mockingly. "I'm an open book." He kept walking backwards, undeterred by the rubble.

Wanda growled. "What about Ultron? Where was your precious accountability then?"

"That, princess?" Stark scoffed. "There was a review. The board cleared me. Ultron was not my fault."

Her long-buried anger flared up again. "What did you do, Stark? How much did you bribe-"

"No, really, I didn't do it," Stark snapped. "You've seen what Vision could do once he got going, and that was after growing up in a stable and supporting environment. Imagine what the Stone could do if all it knew was hatred and insanity. That Stone was in HYDRA hands for who-knows-how-long. It was confused, hurting, and it lashed out and created Ultron."

Wanda paused, considering, but in the end, she decided it didn't matter. It couldn't. She had to have someone responsible for Pietro's death. Ultron was gone. Her revenge seemed...hollow after all that time. Inwardly, she knew it wasn't right to blame Stark, but... if she couldn't blame Stark, that would only leave herself to blame. Wanda couldn't do that, couldn't be the cause of her twin's death, so Stark had to be responsible. It was the only option.

"You're acting as if it was alive," she said, hoping it sounded argumentative.

"Alive, no. Sentient? That's up for debate. I'd need to do a few more tests to know for certain, but for now, yes."

They walked in a silence that was both antagonistic and companionable. Then, Stark stopped mid-
step and began backing away, staring at a spot on the ground. There was nothing but rubble.
Wanda frowned, turning to him for an explanation.

"You know, I don't think Spider-kid's this way," Stark suddenly babbled, apparently unable to bear the silence. "You think he's this way? I bet he swung around." He pivoted without any other warning and began swiftly making his way back.

Wanda snarled in annoyance. They were almost getting along, but apparently Stark couldn't even stand in her presence. "Are you calling me a liar!!" she screeched.

Stark looked over his shoulder. "Wait, what?" his face showed surprise before smoothing out into a false, smiling mask. Wanda reached out with her mind, determined to find his lies. She froze him where he stood and quickly riffled through his surface emotions. To her shock, he was genuinely surprised and wary at her reaction. And annoyed. Angry even. He distrusted her. Wanda let go of his mind, and he continued moving as if nothing had happened because, to him, nothing had happened.

"Wanda," Stark said patronizingly, "I said nothing of that sort. Come on, use that brain I scientifically know you must possess." A slight, considering pause. "Unless you're an alien or android or something. Or AI. Can't forget that one."

Forget what she thought earlier about becoming the best of friends; she and Stark would only be the bitterest of enemies, no matter what life they were in. She had only been trying to extend a hand of truce, and Stark had the nerve to spit on it.

"Just because I have powers doesn't mean I'm not human," Wanda said, glaring. She tossed her mind out. "You're not better than me."

"Never said you weren't, and I never said I was," Stark's lips said. "She's unstable and angry," his mind whispered. "Get to Strange, Strange can protect you."

"I'm not unstable!" Wanda yelled, power flooding her veins. How dare he. How dare he.

"I didn't-" Stark leapt back, out of the way. He froze, eyes widening, and she didn't need her powers to feel his shock. "Were you reading my-"

Even as infuriated as she was, Wanda was proud to say she had perfect control over her powers and actions. Instead of pulverizing his head or torso, Wanda aimed her telekinetic blast at the ground near his feet. While she knew better than to kill him, a few bloody scratches across his face would grant him some humility. Perhaps one of his bones would pierce his ego and deflate it some. At the very least, bed rest would give him a time-out to think over his childish actions.

Stark went flying. Wanda smiled as he soared through the air without his suit. He flew...

Right into the red portal from earlier.

Stark was gone.

Wanda only had a moment to stare in shock before an anguished cry shattered the silence.

"MR. STARK!" Spiderman appeared, swinging past her and towards the red.

A metal projectile blasted past her, the wind buffeting her and tossing her to the side. "Peter, no!" War Machine grabbed the distraught Spider-Man's -"Peter's?- web and used it to steer him away from the destabilizing portal.
Undeterred, Spiderman released the web and leapt unerringly for the portal. Rhodes let out a muffled curse that War Machine's verbal filters cut out midway - part of Spiderman's Training Wheels Protocol, Stark had proudly announced - and dove, catching the smaller hero just meters away from the portal. Spiderman struggled for several moments before becoming limp.

War Machine landed with a thump several meters away from her and put Spiderman down, though he refused to let go of the younger hero's wrist. From there, Wanda could hear Spiderman's sobs.

She stepped forward, only for Rhodes to position himself defensively between herself and the youngest hero. Wanda was offended, but the emotion quickly slipped from her grasp in light of the situation. "I, I-"

Spiderman's sobs stopped as quickly as they appeared. His head snapped up and he stared at her. Then, without warning, he launched himself at her. "Give him back!" he howled before crying out in pain.

Wanda staggered back, but she was in no danger. War Machine's unrelenting grip had inadvertently caused Spiderman to dislocate his own shoulder. Rhodes made an aborted move, as if he was about to turn to Spider-Man, but he didn't. Instead, he raised a gauntlet half-way, aimed at her feet, though he didn't turn it on.

Wanda's back hit something solid as she backed away. Arms raised, Wanda spun to see Sam's grayed face.

"Wanda, what have you done?" Sam asked, shock and... fear?... in his eyes.

"I-I didn't-" she stuttered out. Behind Sam, a little boy and an even younger girl who looked similar to him - siblings? - stared at her. The boy pushed the girl behind him, just like Rhodes had done with Spider-Man when she approached. They were scared. Of her.

Wanda reached out with her mind, trying to calm them down. It wasn't her fault! *I cannot control their fear, only my own.* The boy reached behind him and shoved the girl. Wanda saw his lips move. Though she was too far to hear what he said, the round formation of his lips around the first word was unmistakable. 'Go.' Their minds met. The next word, with her in his mind, rang clearly in her own head. 'Run.'

A metal projectile clipped her side, sending her staggering. Sensing rather than seeing multiple other items cutting through the air, Wanda threw up a shield. The pieces that made up the rest of the Iron Man suit hit the shield one by one, each one pushing the shield just a little back by the merit of pure force, before shortening out due to the power of the shield and falling on the ground. A muffled sob caught her attention.

Wanda whirled around, catching sight of several bystanders, all backing away. The people at the back broke off, turning and running. As if it was a signal, all the other people began sprinting away from her, leaving a growing circle of emptiness.

"I-I can fix this!" Wanda sobbed, nearly begging. Panicked, Wanda grasped at whatever she could sense of her powers and called them, dragged them back. She expected to pull Stark back from wherever he landed.

She didn't realize that part of the power she was pulling back was part of the portal itself. She didn't expect the portal to collapse into itself the moment her powers left it.
She didn't expect all the fear.
Chapter Summary

Tony wakes up, alone and injured, in a run-down alley. His first thought, of course, is that he'd been sober for at least half a year now, so why'd he choose now of all times to be drunk?

Chapter Notes

Italics are either other languages or for emphasis, depending on how they are used.
You guys figure it out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony stirred. His head felt terrible. Of all times to get drunk! He felt as if he'd fallen from a portal in the sky and got rescued by a Hulk, except this time, the Hulk had grabbed him by the head. He opened his eyes, but the world wouldn't focus. His surrounding were in shades of brown and gray, and the sky was dark.

"How many shots did I take?" Tony groaned, straining turn on his back to sit up. To his surprise, his arms gave out underneath him and he slammed back onto what felt like rough concrete.

Tony paused. This wasn't usual for a hangover. Actually, this whole thing didn't make sense.

He'd been more... moderate... in his drinking ever since that last post-'Civil War' (as the media called it) drinking binge, where he decided that the Ex-vengers had no more power over him, that he wouldn't fulfill their expectations of him just to make them feel better. With that resolution, Tony had felt more like himself than he had for years. This wasn't the man that had let himself be dangled by the throat. This wasn't the man that had taken all the blame for Sokovia without protest. This wasn't the man that scrambled after the Ex-vengers like a puppy looking for praise, gratefully cleaning up their mess.

This was the man who built a marvel of technology out of scraps, in a cave, surrounded by terrorists. This was the man who stood in front of the Senate, ready to defend himself and his. This was the man who held half the world in his hands.

This was Tony F***ing Stark.

...

Of course, he would have to be Tony F-ing Stark after he figured out what happened.

For one, he was certain he had a concussion. Tony was usually the life of the party, but he wasn't dramatic in his own head, so therefore it must be a concussion. Now that he diagnosed his head - Tony was nothing without his mind - , he thought it safe to check his body. Tony had never been squeamish, but he was worried about the fact that he didn't feel anything, not even when he hit the
ground. He rolled onto his back and craned his head. There was blood all over him.

"Huh, that would do it," he mused. "Should I call for help? I should call for help."

Except for the fact that he was suit-less and helpless. With the luck he was having lately, he'd call down a group of gangsters and muggers who'd capture him and ask for a huge sum of money. He and Stark Industries had an understanding - no caving into demands for ransoms. The... wait, why was he thinking about this again? Tony peered at his again.

Tony could feel the deep ache that indicated the recent healing of broken bones, but it seemed that his modified Extermis serum had given out before completely finishing. His arms were scratched up, torn and bleeding. His right hand was completely red. His torso was less beat-up, but still rather painful-looking. He lifted the collar of his shirt. Yep, as he thought - bruised up.

A liquid dripped into his left eye and Tony wiped it off with the sleeve of his T-shirt. More blood.

Tony let his head hit the ground again. "I'd say 'how could this get any worse,' but I know the universe is out to get me and all that, so I better not tempt it. Or her. The universe is a she, isn't it? And she's out to get me because I left her hanging. I didn't even know that we were dating." Tony thought about that for another second. "Stupid concussion," he decided.

Painstakingly, Tony eased himself to a sitting position, alternatingly looking at the end of the alley and at the wall in front of him. He blinked routinely. Slowly, the world came into focus, both in his mind and in his eyes.

He wasn't in a nice alley. That would've been too much to ask for. It was a run-down, dirty little space behind suspicious-looking buildings. Smog filled the air, nearly suffocating. Just a few meters to his left, Tony could see some kind of dead animal. It was huge, for something found in a city. And it was a city. The buildings on either side of the alley traveled high above him. Past the exit of the alley, he could see another tall building, and beyond that, several skyscrapers. The colorful lights that decorated them cut dimly through the polluted air, reminding him of a mixture between Las Vegas and Tokyo, if they had been hit with the eighteenth-century industrial revolution. It certainly wasn't a place he recognized.

"S***, Wanda, what did you do now?" Tony asked aloud, slapping his face with his hand in exasperation, forgetting that it was covered in blood.

*CLANG!* 

...Apparently, the red on his right hand was, in fact, not blood. Tony hissed out several curses in Italian, glaring at his gauntlet.

His gauntlet.

"Friday? Friday!" Tony grasped the gauntlet like it was salvation, and in a way, it was. "Friday, are you there? Friday?" The gauntlet slowly hummed to life, each moment raising his hopes.

"-oss? Boss!" FRIDAY's frantic, static-filled voice was a balm to his shattered nerves.

"It's okay, I'm here," Tony reassured.

"Boss. Boss!"

"Friday?" A frown crossed his face. "I'm fine."
"Boss! Boss? Boss! Boss!" FRIDAY repeated in various tones and pitches, obviously trying to convey something.

Nevermind what he said about this being a balm. This was worse than being tossed into another portal. This was worse than Afghanistan. In fact, this was almost on par with JAVRIS's death. What did Wanda do to his friend, his companion, his baby girl, his daughter in every way JARVIS was his son? "Friday? Baby girl? You okay?"

"Boss, boss!" If anything, FRIDAY seemed to go into panic. "Boss-boss-boss! Boss!"

"Baby girl, it's okay. I'm here. Is that the only thing you can say? Can you try to say anything else? Can you hear me? One 'boss' for yes, two for no."

"...Boss," FRIDAY's voice quavered between static bursts.

"Okay, we can fix this," Tony assured her. "Call Pepper. No, wait. Send a suit over."

"Boss-boss."

"...No? Are we out of range? Wait, that doesn't make sense. The suit can fly anywhere. Are we... in North Korea? I mean, I know they have a shoot-on-sight order, but... still," Tony mused.

"Boss-boss," FRIDAY repeated.

Tony stared. "Okay, then. I guess we go find a phone and I repair you while Pepper sends a jet and negotiates with the government whose country I landed in?" He thought for a moment. "Eat a bunch for unhealthy foods to get Extermis going too, I guess."

"Boss-boss," FRIDAY said urgently.

"It'll be okay," Tony said, patting the gauntlet. He fiddled with a hidden compartment and removed a tiny, special packet from a hidden compartment. Ripping it open with his teeth, Tony held his breath and chewed quickly before swallowing the crushed pill in hopes of not tasting it. It didn't work. Tony's "Homemade Diabetes Pill" was a bane to his taste buds and throat as it traveled down. "Guhhh, that was disgusting!"

"Boss, boss-boss-boss," FRIDAY deadpanned. "Boss, boss?" she said questioningly. Tony considered her tone and looked at the gashes on his arms, which were slowly healing.

"Sure, baby girl, I'm all right. Just need another minute or two" Tony said fondly. "Let's get outta here."

"Bossssss," FRIDAY whined.

Tony stood up, staggering against the wall once more when his legs suddenly strengthened. "This reminds me of that time I drank three Red Bulls. Does this remind you of that time? No?" Tony babbled, hoping for some sense of normalcy. FRIDAY remained quiet, though whether it was because she was indulging him or because she was self-conscious of her recent bout of inarticulacy, he did not know. He hoped it was the former, but feared it was the latter. His young creation had reached another sudden growth in self-awareness, and it was making her second-guess herself whenever she had an idle server. His little girl deserved better than that.

When JARVIS reached that stage, he had the knowledge that he was the one-and-only, decades upon decades ahead of his time. FRIDAY knew she was a replacement for JARVIS. She wasn't the only AI, either. With JOCASTA online, VERONICA in orbit, and 'Karen' with Peter, Tony could
Tony wanted to help her, but he didn't know how to tell his baby girl. He was busy thinking of plans to do so as he turned around the corner and onto the main street. As such, it could be excused that he didn't realize that more than half of the people who were walking down the street weren't exactly human. Having been to many non-English speaking countries with only a translator or translating device or two for help, it could also be excused that he didn't realize the language spoken wasn't English or any language recognizable on Earth.

It was only when FRIDAY discreetly buzzed against his skin that Tony stopped and suddenly saw his surroundings.

"Huh," Tony said with more calm than the situation warranted, examining a giant bug of some sort that was climbing off a floating vehicle. "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

\[I\text{ am Iron Man}\] \]

After his realization, the scientific portion of his brain kicked in with a vengeance. The humans, or what looked to be humans, seemed to be rather at ease with the aliens, just shuffling past then. Humans and aliens alike were absorbed in their own problems, so no differences there. The technology was really something else, though.

Tony greedily eyed the flying vehicles far above, following a road only they could see. His fingers twitched, dying to take apart one of them to see how it worked. Already, plans and semantics were listing themselves in his mind, more ideas adding or removing from the list with every observation. He could already see which component was the power cell. It had repulsor technology of some sort, though the lack of motion as a fat slug as it left one of the larger vehicles made him tentatively cross out a strong use of anti-gravs.

A small flap of cloth fluttered down, past their level and closer to the core of the planet. Curious, Tony walked over to the railing, dodging pedestrians that grunted with annoyance.

Finally there, Tony peered down a railing and into a black void. Tony picked up some litter and tossed it in, just to make sure it was real and not a clever illusion. Unless his concussion was worse than he actually thought and unable to heal in the minutes since Extermis 3.0 kicked in, it was real.

He quickly made his way away from the railing and deeper into the city, wincing at the thought of a sudden drop. Definitely lethal.

Sure, Tony didn't fear heights. He just wasn't stupid or trying to tempt fate. With his luck, he'd probably get hit by one of the flying scooters that he desperately wanted to take apart and go tumbling into the darkness. 'Be careful what you wish for,' and all that.

After watching some humans loom over scantily-clad, voluptuous females (both human and not), Tony decided that 'credits' were the units of currency for that civilization. FRIDAY seemed to agree, so Tony took that as the best confirmation he could take. Some transactions and dialogue exchanges were universal, after all. He eyed the human escorting a man deeper into the building and gave the non-human an appreciative look as she beckoned him over. Unfortunately, Tony had resolved to turn over a new leaf (and was currently broke), so he had to be above acts of such a lewd nature. Tony flashed his best smile and continued on.

Tony noticed all of the stares he was getting. At first, he thought it was his ripped shirt or the torn flight-suit he had under that. That apparently wasn't the cause - there were people and aliens in
even more outlandish states of dress or, in this case, undress. In fact, he was sure that last alien was naked.

Even though he was a relative unknown, it seemed like people couldn't seem to resist Tony. A hard hand wrapped around his wrist, and Tony turned to find himself dragged into a small gap between buildings.

"Hey," Tony said, confused. The thing holding him didn't even turn to him. Realizing that this was more serious than he first thought, Tony dug in his heels in. "Hey!"

To his surprise, no one looked at the small confrontation. From the way they were acting, this sort of thing was commonplace. There were no peace officers he could see of, so Tony knew he had to take care of this himself. Quickly, Tony twisted and slammed his gauntleted hand into the things face. It howled, letting go of him to clutch at its face. Instead of taking advantage of this and pressing his attack, Tony took the moment of respite to slip into the crowd. There was no sign of pursuit, so Tony relaxed after several more blocks.

"Friday, note that people here really don't care what you do, as long as it doesn't affect them," Tony said, frustrated with how self-absorbed everyone was. Friday vibrated for a second and went silent. That was when he noticed the slumped-over postures, the way all the pedestrians seemed to huddle into themselves and keep their heads down. "Oh," Tony said. Huh, that must have been why everyone was staring. He slumped over in a downtrodden stance and hung his head, shuffling a couple steps.

He sidestepped a pair of drunks and kept on his way. A giant slug oozing its way into a casino. What looked like a corpse, but hopefully wasn't. A hobbled mother holding her infant daughter, standing in the darkness of a build with her palm out in a begging position. Tony automatically reached for his wallet, finding nothing but air.

He quietly walked past, not looking back.

Then, something jabbed at his throat and he was pulled into yet another alley. Tony turned and looked into red eyes. Harsh, nasally tones emitted from that reptilian thing's toothy mouth. Tony recognized the rounded word, 'credits,' as it waved its knife in a way that was vaguely threatening. Of course, to someone who had been on the receiving end of Natasha's glare-and-knife-fiddling combo, the lizard's comparatively clumsy power-play wasn't threatening at all. Admittedly, if the alien tripped while taking another step forward, the knife was too awkwardly positioned for Tony to completely avoid.

"Is he... demanding my money?" Tony asked incredulously as he carefully took a step to the side, unwilling to tempt fate, now that he had that thought.

"Boss," FRIDAY agreed. The creature turned its gaze to the gauntlet where FRIDAY resided.

"Look, dude, I don't have anything," Tony said crossly, raising his arms up and nodding down at his skin-tight clothes, hoping to draw the thing's attention away from FRIDAY. The creature eyed him dubiously and jabbed the knife at his neck again before reaching for FRIDAY. Tony immediately took a half-step back, pulling FRIDAY to his chest protectively. "Uh, no, get your hands away from her," Tony said, glaring. He took another step back, ignoring the creature's angry hiss.

The reptile slid its scaly fingers along the edge of the knife, making a scraping sound that would have unnerved a the average American as it approached. Luckily, Tony wasn't an average American. He lunged forward before the reptile could enter his personal space.
Many people believed Tony was nothing without his suit. They forgot that one, fateful press conference.

"I am Iron Man."

The suit was just that; a suit. Tony was Iron Man, with or without his armor, and that's what they didn't understand. He had trained extensively to keep up with Clint, Sam, Rhodey, and any other normal human that entered the superhero scene. While he didn't specialize in unarmed combat, he was perfectly capable of holding his own against them even before Extermis was injected.

As the arm holding the blade descended, Tony tracked it with his eyes. His right hand, the hand with FRIDAY, pummeled the thing's chest. It did not seem deterred by the pounding metal gauntlet. The scales covering it must have afforded it more protection than he thought. Tony raised his left arm just in time to deflect the stab, batting the lizard's wrist away with his forearm. Tony had never been so grateful he pounded out his armor himself. All that blacksmithing had earned him muscles that he wouldn't have gotten if he had just machine-made it.

And those muscles were needed.

Even with a primitive, watered-down prototype of Extermis flowing through his veins, Tony would have been hard-pressed to deflect the knife. That lizard was strong, stronger than any human. Too busy with attacking, Tony nearly didn't give himself enough time to defend himself.

He narrowed his eyes.

A mistake he would not make again.

His shock and analysis happened in a split second, and Tony wasted no time sweeping his foot around and catching back the reptile's knee. They both went down.

The reptile was apparently a novice. No experienced fighter would allow himself to wallow in shock. Or herself. Tony wasn't sexist. The creature was still surprised that its strength had not been enough to down Tony. Tony used that to his advantage, pinning the creature down and wrestling the knife away. He pressed the knife to a weak spot he had observed along the side of the creature's neck, just hard enough to make it bleed.

It threw itself at him, but Tony moved his neck away from its jaws. As it twisted and flailed, Tony adjusted his position to keep it pinned down. Realizing it could not get free, it looked at him in fear and started babbling rapidly.

"I don't know what you're saying," Tony said flatly. It stopped speaking, seemingly understanding what Tony was trying to say. It looked at him in... resignation?... and went limp.

Tony felt a strange swell of pity and empathy as he took in the defeated alien. He eyed the creature in suspicion, wondering for a moment if it was an empath and messing with his emotions. It didn't matter. Tony wasn't a killer. Not in the way people thought he was.

"You're not worth it," Tony decided, standing up and walking away. For a moment, he thought of dropping the knife for both symbolic and dramatic purposes but decided not to, in the end. He had no supplies in this strange, new planet, and a knife would provide a cheap and easy defense. A gun would be more useful, but he didn't know where to get one yet.

Soft shuffling and the quiet steps followed him as he walked to the entrance of the alley. "I do hope you aren't stupid enough to attack me again," Tony said as threateningly as he could. It sounded more tired than anything.
No answer.

Tony slowly pivoted on his heel and took stock of the reptilian alien. It duck its head and shuffled its feet, looking rather like a chastised child. A very dangerous, muscular lizard-human child.

"Um, o-kay?" Tony said. He started walking again, stopping and turning when he heard the thing follow him. "Are you just going to follow me around?" He eyed it warily. Like before, there was no answer. Tony inwardly shrugged. It was not his problem if the lizard followed him and got lost.

At first, Tony walked hunched and small. After a few blocks, he realized that it made no difference; people still stared and gave him a small berth. He didn't understand. Humans were common enough. So was poverty. The only difference was... the lizard.

Tony stopped and spun around to face the lizard, annoyed. He had to crane his head back to see its face. It regarded him for a moment before stepping back to give him space. It was almost... respectful. At that thought, Tony turned around and started walking again, this time looking for reflective surfaces. Along the dirty glass of yet another bar, Tony could see himself and his unwanted tag-a-long. The taller creature loomed over him imposingly, following a step behind him and half a step to the right, as Happy always did. Tony felt a pang of loss but brushed it off. Was the alien trying to...protect him?

"You seem more useful than I thought you were," Tony said, loud enough for it to hear. It grunted confusedly. They must have made a strange pair, a ragged human and a reptilian alien cutting a grim figure behind him. Tony turned around, steering clear of the crowd. "Tony," he said, patting his own chest. He looked expectantly at the reptile before repeating it.

It took a few tries before the reptile said, "Gis'tik Kal Tos," indicating itself.

"Well, Gis," Tony said, smiling brightly, "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Hatcherd Ghrakhowsk," 'Gis' grunted grimly.

Not sure whether it was a 'nice-to-finally-know-your-name' or a 'I-will-kill-you-for-the-dishonor-of-shortening-my-name,' Tony continued grinning and nodding.

-I am Iron Man-

After trekking the city for what seemed like days, Tony came to the conclusion that the city was a lot larger than he thought it did. He was just planning on mapping the entire thing until he found a welcoming center, but the entire place seemed to be a drug cartel. He seen things he would have rather remained unseen, including a stripper-grandma he caught a glimpse of through a club window.

Finally figuring that the sun wasn't rising any time soon - that planet they were on must have a longer rotational cycle than Tony thought it did - Tony settled down in a quiet, less-dusty corner to sleep.

At first, Gis seemed quietly tolerant, if not confused. After a while, Gis worked itself up to displeased hisses and grunts. "Brac," the reptile said. "Lucumba!"

Tony cracked open an eyelid and peered up to the hovering reptile. "What?" he groaned. He allowed his tentative ally to prod him up to his feet.

The alien examined him and, apparently realizing that Tony was half-asleep, hooked a clawed finger on the collar of Tony's shirt and all but dragged him out of the alley. Too tired to care about
whether or not the reptilian was leading him somewhere to get robbed, Tony followed it down several blocks through an alley of homeless figures, up a ladder cleverly disguised as wall paneling, down several thin ledges, and through a literal hole in the wall.

Chapter End Notes

I think I'll post a chapter once a week, so... every Tuesday, I guess? I mean, I posted the prologue over the weekend, but that's so...boring. Tuesdays are pretty ignored, not a weekend and neither the beginning, middle, or end, so let's make Tuesdays my special day.

It'll probably take another few chapters before this story takes off the ground. We can't make everything TOO easy for Tony, ;) and he'll need some time to pick himself off the ground and learn the language. Well, that, and the fact that I still need to watch some YouTube crash courses on robots, read Wookieepedia articles on Star Wars, and figure out what the [insert bad word here] I'm trying to do with this story.

...How did the amount of Kudos for "Into the Ice" nearly equal this? That thing... well, that thing was...horrible.
Crashland(?) Let's Hit the Ground Running

Chapter Summary

Tony may not have the suit, but he was still the person who MADE the suit. True, he couldn't quite make the suit right now, but this was certainly a start.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The stale air in the room was one of the signs that maybe something was off. It was so off from the cool air conditioning that Stark Industries preferred to use, instead being hot and dry. Even the bustling city outside felt wrong, too close and too loud.

Slowly, the bundle on the floor stirred. It sat up, groaning, scraps of cloth falling off of it to reveal a certain human inventor. Tony blinked in the darkness, unable to make out any shapes. Confused, he felt the softness that surrounded him. Not quite sure where he was, Tony decided to take a risk.

"Friday, lights," he requested. He expected the ceiling lights to light up, but that didn't happen. Instead, the repulsor on the palm of the gauntlet obligingly lit up, bathing the room in a lightly blued light. It revealed a ramshackle room, filled with old junk and two piles of rags. The pile he was burrowed in was more than twice the size of the other one, just ten feet away. As he observed it in confusion, it twitched. Alarmed, Tony reflexively brought up his hand and aimed his repulsor, ready to fire.

A scaly head poked up, teeth bared and snarling at the colored light.

"Friday, lights," he requested. He expected the ceiling lights to light up, but that didn't happen. Instead, the repulsor on the palm of the gauntlet obligingly lit up, bathing the room in a lightly blued light. It revealed a ramshackle room, filled with old junk and two piles of rags. The pile he was burrowed in was more than twice the size of the other one, just ten feet away. As he observed it in confusion, it twitched. Alarmed, Tony reflexively brought up his hand and aimed his repulsor, ready to fire.

A scaly head poked up, teeth bared and snarling at the colored light.

It took a moment, but Tony remembered the previous day.

"Oh, hello, Gil." Tony stopped and mentally repeated the words again. That wasn't right... Gil? ...Gris? "Gis, my mistake."

"Ghrakhowsk Tony," Gis acknowledged, moving from his spot but keeping an eye on the gauntlet. Was Gis a 'he,' or was he an 'it?' Actually, for all Tony knew, Gis could be a female.

Ghrakhowsk... was that alien for 'hi?'

"Ghrakhowsk Gis," Tony tried, only to get snarled at for his troubles.

"Sham'julamba ghrakhowsk!" it said, slamming its fists on the floor violently. "Tony gwa Ghrakhowsk!"

"Okay, okay!" Tony blurted out hurriedly, because he definitely wasn't going to die tonight. Or day. Whatever. "Ghrakhowsk doesn't mean 'hi,' got it." It took a pleading look before Gis calmed down, stalking over and plopping down next to him. The reptile eyed the gauntlet but didn't ask for it. Feeling a surge of respect at the restraint, Tony held out the hand inside the gauntlet.

"Go on, I bet you're curious. All these flying cars, but you guys don't have flashlight-gloves," Tony joked while silently praying that his hand wasn't going to get ripped off.
Gis prodded the gauntlet, running its hands up and down the smooth metal. While it did this, Tony took the time to examine it (him?). Dull, green scales colored its back, while its chest, face, and neck bore brown scales. At different places around those areas, the brown scales almost seemed a bruised purple. Now that he wasn't actively trying to pretend he wasn't enthralled at the sight of another sentient species, Tony realized the alien looked...young, for a lack of other words.

Free from its self-assigned bodyguard duty, Gis had a curious tilt to its head as it fumbled with the interlocked titanium-gold alloy. Gis seemed unfamiliar with its own fingers and arms, as if it had just had a very large growth spurt. The limbs were long and gangly in a way that screamed 'teenager' if one actually looked. The long limbs and hint of lean muscles suggested that the alien had once been well-fed, but the muscles had long since started to atrophy. The 'nest' that Tony had slept in had been otherwise unoccupied through what passed as night. Due to these observations, Tony suspected that the alien had been orphaned, not abandoned, just a handful of weeks prior.

Due to a lack of a... larger chest area... on the humanoid, Tony felt safe to assume that the alien was a male, not a female. He mentally compared the excited Gis to Peter when shown a new gadget. Despite Gis and Peter's similarity, strength-wise, Tony eventually decided that Gis was more like Harley. After all, where Gis pulled a knife at their first meeting, Harley loaded a gun. It was a potato gun, but still...

A metallic screech broke through his thoughts and Tony looked up to see a very guilty Gis holding the pinky of the gauntlet.

"I know guys with none of that worth ten of you-

"This place?" Tony asked, glancing at the run-down building Gis led him to. "Looks promising," Tony agreed, peering through the dust-coated window to see piles upon piles of metal scraps and broken gadgets. "Definitely my sort of place."

Tony pushed the door open and walked through, ignoring the discordant clangs the metal bits hanging on the back of the door made. An alien who Tony assumed owned the shop hurried over at the noise. It had a trunk that was much shorter than an elephant's trunk, though it was also framed with downward-pointing twin tusks.

And of course Tony knew not to stare; he had manners, after all. He wasn't uncivilized. Then again, he never thought he would ever be in such a situation.

It, well, presumably a he, seemed to ask Tony a question, to which he politely coughed at. When the alien finally spotted Gris, it started shouting at him, nasal huffs punctuating each breath.

Alarmed, Tony watched as it stormed over and raised a hand to strike the smaller alien. Tony darted between the two. "Hey, hey! Whoa! None of that, now," Tony yelled, rushed, as he narrowly stopped the other alien from cuffing Gis over the head.

Evidently surprised, the other alien looked between Tony and Gis, talking to Gis in what seemed to be the most common language around. Gis answered, the other alien said something else, and the two of them looked at Tony and started laughing. They were friends. Tony scowled.

"Hey, I went through all that trouble to save you," Tony huffed, offended. He was ignored as the two aliens started chatting once more. Constant glances at him made it clear what the topic of their conversation was.

Deciding Gis was reasonably safe for now, Tony headed between the scrap piles, looking for something to help FRIDAY. When he returned with a wire basket filled to the brim with cables,
aluminum, random knick-knacks he felt the urge to take apart and examine, and a miniature, broken tablet of some kind, the tusked alien scowled and headed over. Tony blinked.

"Oh... right. You want payment for all this." Tony felt foolish for forgetting that he was currently penniless. He wondered if they carried out his will, back at home, yet. Probably not. If they wanted to, they'd have to find it first. Tony had given it to DUM-E a couple weeks back, and he was positive his eldest creation didn't know the significance of that fireproof envelope. Eh, not his problem anymore.

He lugged his stuff over to a large worktable that ran along the back wall, eyeing the many projects that lay there. "I don't suppose you accept labor?" He prodded at the objects, mentally taking them apart and putting them together. He could do this. Probably.

"Let's see..." mused Tony, sorting through all the junk. "Burned wires... this one's disconnected... hmmm, think I can fix this..." He picked up a huge motor-like part, turning it over in his arms. "No idea what this is... Oh, cool... no, wait..." Tony pulled off one of the gadgets that hung on the wall, clicking it on. It vibrated in his hand. Not sure what use a vibrator would be, he turned it off and grabbed the next item. This time it was familiar. He flipped the hammer expertly in his hand.

"Nice balance," he approved before setting it aside. He quickly identified a screwdriver, bolts, and a small, odd washer. "Now, if this is what I think it is..." Tony plucked a tool with a tapered head and pressed a button on its handle. Sure enough, the blowtorch turned on. A very special blowtorch that was more like a laser than a burst of flame. "Now this is what I'm talking about!"

Tony picked up what looked like a circular radio, though open, with its innards trailing out. Holding a pair of tweezers gently between his fingers, Tony manipulated a blue wire between the tongs. He looked back up to the owner of the shop to see if it would stop him.

The elephant alien hesitated. Perhaps sensing master blacksmith at work, it decided to stand aside and let him work.

And Tony worked.

Tony was a man possessed. It felt like he was in a trance. Every move was smooth and automatic, every thought at lightening speed. His stress melted away. Every bit of anger, every spark of resentment evaporated with the bass pounding of his hammer that melded with a song only he could hear.

He finished project after project under the amazed eyes of his two-alien audience.

Shattered metal covering plates were removed and wielded back together, heated up and hammered together so smoothly, it looked as if the cracks were there for aesthetic purposes. Cases were cracked open so broken screens could be removed, the glass melted back together into a seamless whole. Clumsy dents were coaxed out of plates, unsightly scorch marks and scars bluffed. Wirings and circuits were curiously followed, only for Tony to decide the whole thing was obsolete, disconnecting the entire thing and rewiring it from nothing but scratch and memory. Fingers danced over malfunctioning drones, searching for a flaw that prevented them from working properly.

Droid chips were plugged into the now-fixed tablet. Alien coding fell open before his hands and mind, their secrets in plain sight to him. The symbols, so like the zeros and ones from earth, just made sense in a way nothing else did.

When the first droid came online, Tony was too far away to feel surprised at how much
more sentient it was than anything Pym or Hammer or anyone else made. Like FRIDAY, it too had its own form of life. For the first time since becoming stranded in this new world, Tony removed FRIDAY's gauntlet, giving it to the droid. Upon realizing the armor it held in its hands was also had a mind, the droid began conversing with FRIDAY in beeps and clicks, and various tones of 'Boss.' It seemed like robo-speech was universal.

Some time after that, Tony became aware that Gis had left. Actually, he only noticed when a warm, salty smell filled the room and Gis came in from the entrance with some meaty slop in a carton. Tony waved it off to the side, too busy to eat at the moment. The elephant alien had just carted over some more projects. Tony accepted them without a backward glance.

-I know guys with none of that worth ten of you-

Hours later, when Tony reached for the next project, he was met with nothing but air. He blinked and felt around again. Still nothing.

Wait, no there was something, he picked up a squared bowl with... was that meat on it? Tony picked up the fork and speared the mystery meat. It gave a small wobble, as if it was still raw. Just to make sure it was actually food and not, say, the solidified engine oil he had once taken a bite of on accident, thinking it was Jell-O, Tony gave it a discreet sniff. Definitely, well, most likely, edible. He ate it.

Tony turned back to the table. It took a moment for him to reach awareness, but Tony realized that he finished fixing all of the projects. "Friday, did I just go on another three-day work binge?" Tony asked, internally cataloging his collections of aches and pain and deciding that yes, it was definitely three days' worth of hunger pangs.

FRIDAY signaled an affirmative.

"I'm sorry, baby girl, I didn't mean to leave you all alone," Tony crooned.

"Apologies - Sir - Think - Count - As - Good - Discussion," the silver droid interrupted.

"What?" asked Tony.

"Me - I - Good - Talk - FRIDAY," the droid said, seemingly frustrated.

"Oh, of course," Tony realized. "I didn't mean to imply you didn't count. I completely forgot I fixed you. I'm sure you were a worthy conversation partner for FRIDAY. How much did she teach you?"

"Apologies - Repetition?"

"How much did FRIDAY teach you?" Tony said slowly and clearly.

"Little." Tony considered this. Robots seemed to strive for perfection, so 'little' could stand for anything between 'about a hundred words' to 'elementary school comprehension level.'

"Could you please ask your owner if I could have a job?" Tony asked plaintively.

-I know guys with none of that worth ten of you-

Tony was a businessman. He once coaxed a small melting factory from another business, then convinced the manager to buy it back at twice the cost. Tony knew how to talk and sell his ideas. Unfortunately, he had to first know how to talk to sell his ideas. Body language and a game of charades couldn't quite get the meanings across, and the first time he forgot and started talking in
English out of sheer loneliness, the human trying to buy some parts merely gave him a disdainful look and turned his nose up.

Ketolin - his new boss - quickly realized that, though charming, Tony had to expand his vocabulary a lot more before he could even be considered a competent salesman.

The days fell into routine. True, Tony still wasn't sure how long whatever counted as a 'day' was; after all this time, he still hadn't seen the sun. He had caught sight of a large, astrological body in the sky though. Speckled and clouded, he could often see it looming in the sky like an overseer, ominous and dangerous.

Still, he got up whenever Gis nudged him awake. They would walk together to Ketolin's shop, though most of the time, Gis would split off and keep walking. Tony would have multiple 'breaks' throughout his work shift, though he worked straight through them. It baffled his boss, but KS-04, the droid Tony repaired, was unable to either comprehend or convey the fact that Tony was used to working way too long. Whenever Gis returned and entered the shop, Tony considered his shift over and clocked out. In the three hours before they would go to sleep, Tony would use his credits to buy dinner for himself and Gis. Whatever time was left over, he spent exploring the alleys around his new home and making friendly with the natives.

Outwardly, FRIDAY was completely fine. The vibranium-coated titanium-gold plates were as sturdy as they had always been. Inside was a different matter. Tony had put a thin layer of plastic over all the internals after Wanda came into the scene. 'Magic' usually clung onto natural materials, the more organic, the better. Wanda, Strange, and the other magicians could throw about heroes clad in cotton or leather with ease. Metals were purified from their natural forms, and therefore a lot harder to manipulate, though still possible. Plastic, though? It was completely unnatural, causing deflecting 'magic' with ease. Tony used a starlite, miracle plastic that could withstand a stunning amount of heat. He didn't like the fact that heat somehow got through and was planning on asking FRIDAY what happened.

 Seriously. The starlite was still there, completely fine. How did all these wires burn out?

Yes-and-no questions were his new bane of existence. Throwing out outlandish hypotheses about what happened at home was no fun without his girl to rip them to shreds. To say the truth, he was pretty certain of what would happen. Steve might be a Brooklyn kid, but New York was Tony's city. The New Yorkers were Tony's people, and they would stand up for him, even when he gave up on himself. Wanda wouldn't be getting out unscathed.

For his part, Ketolin all but gave him free range of the shop. It was clear the creature had no idea how to run a mechanics shop. Sure, the elephant-like alien could convince customers to buy just a little more than they needed to, root out 'junk' from competitors' stores, and knew his way around a search engine, but his mechanical expertise stopped at taking stuff apart. Though parts could fetch a fair price, they found that Tony's repaired mechanics earned quite a bit more.

In the space between little shipments of trashed gadgets, Tony had little gaps of spare time, which he filled questioning KS-04 to try to learn the alien language (It wasn't working that well. He was pretty sure something got mistranslated; Gis gave him a strange look every time he said goodbye), trying to fix FRIDAY, and taking apart electronics in hope that he could find something to help FRIDAY.

Occasionally, he worked on a radio that Ketolin let him have. Normally, radios received radio waves, but he was trying to do something different with this one. The waves it would be tracking wouldn't be radio waves. It would figure out where this galaxy was, relative to the Milky Way.
Sometimes, Tony was given commissions. He couldn't read the detailed instructions left behind, but he could look at blueprints and semantics and guess the purpose of each part. With his eidetic memory, Tony could still remember all the different pieces necessary for a 'speeder bike.' Sorting through the inventory gave him a good grasp of what and how much the shop held; he knew that there was enough parts. All he needed was time.

Tony always inwardly panicked each time Gis parted ways with him at the store. He had nowhere to go, and if Gis left him, Tony was mildly certain he’d die on the streets. He had explored the blocks around Gis's hovel, and what he found wasn't encouraging. There were no police men or peacekeepers of any sort, so crime ran rampant. The pollution and litter caused diseases and Tony felt his life expectancy draining every time he took a breath. It was almost guaranteed that he would see a dead body every other time he left the apartment.

Strangely, it seemed that Gis was every bit as wary of Tony leaving him. Sometimes, when Tony finished repairing a gadget and looked up, he saw Gis walk past. Tony ended up propping a small hand mirror against the corner so he could catch the reassuring sight of Gis checking in on him.

Despite feeding the alien dinner every 'day,' the reptile wasn't getting less thin. In fact, Tony was becoming more and more certain that the meal he ate with the alien was the only meal Gis ate every day. If Gis had skin, Tony was willing to bet that his face would look gaunt by now, but the malnourishment was hidden by scales.

Tony didn't know what to do. Gis ignored Tony's attempts to buy him breakfast and pretended to not understand when Tony used the limited, broken speech that he had KS-04 teach him.

The only thing Tony could do was hope FRIDAY had an answer.

*-*I know guys with none of that worth ten of you-*

The casing closed with an ominous click. The antenna that Tony had inserted nearly three days ago had to be moved to the other side of the gauntlet to make space for FRIDAY’s new additions. It rankled that he had to admit it, but it was a mistake. Tony had done the best he could, but the few data chips in the glove were small, not meant to encompass the entirety of the magnificent being that was FRIDAY. This wasn't the true FRIDAY. FRIDAY was on SI servers. What he had was a copy of about a tenth of her matrix. Even so, she was his right-hand girl and Tony would never abandon a single part of her.

He had to remove a chip that was completely fried by the journey through the portal, replacing it with alien ones. The circumference of the gauntlet around the wrist and elbow had increased by half an inch each. Tony had taken it apart and ringed it with as many chips he could find and repair before covering it up with armor again. More protection would need to be added, but he had to see if it worked first.

What Tony did with it, he had always wanted to do back on Earth. However, AI-phobia, brought on by the Terminator series, had Tony restricting JARVIS's coding to seem like less of a threat, once he was discovered due to a loose-lipped assistant and Obie. FRIDAY was kept offline.

After JARVIS's death, Tony had made sure FRIDAY had the coding, too. That time, it wasn't society's influence and mob mentality that forced his hand.

It was Tony's own fear.

At first, Tony knew he didn't create Ultron. Ultron was an alien sentience that took control of some of his technology and absorbed part of the ULTRON project's programming to gain control of its'
wide reach. However, with Sovokia calling for his blood and the Ex-vengers' accusations every
time he stepped out of the lab, Tony had started believing it himself.

And his little girl paid for it.

Unable to trust himself and his work, Tony had placed failsafe upon failsafe, imbedded brick walls
and kill switches into every branch of her coding.

In doing so, he crippled his little girl.

She never faulted him for it, taking the coding and burying it into hers every time he hesitated.
Looking back, Tony felt ashamed.

This time, in a world with AIs on every block, looking out of every shop, Tony was determined to
do right by her. This time, FRIDAY would be free.

Tony had coded the bare basics of what he could remember of FRIDAY’s matrix. He could have
just inserted everything he knew about FRIDAY, but that wasn't the goal. Tony believed that
FRIDAY had the right to be what - who - she wished to be, not what he wanted her to be. As such,
the codes he inserted were to be used as scaffolding. FRIDAY would use them, rebuilding her
matrix around them. FRIDAY’s core coding would still be there, but she would be the architect of
everything else. She would be her own person. At least, that's what Tony expected (hoped) would
happen.

He had run well over the suggested number of simulations on the two differing pieces of hardware,
but FRIDAY should be able to overcome the inherent differences in technology. It took him a bit
more than triple the amount of time it should have, but he didn't want to accidently cause a glitch
or delete some of what made FRIDAY, FRIDAY.

"Friday?" Tony asked wearily, removing his goggles and running a hand through his greasy hair
tiredly. FRIDAY had been silent for days now, and he couldn't help but worry as several moments
passed. He placed a hand on the table, leaning forward. Unfortunately, this action caused his elbow
to knock his radio off the table. Tony looked at the broken pieces in barely-concealed devastation.

Just as he was about to yell in frustration, the arc reactor in the gauntlet hummed with power.
"Here, boss!" FRIDAY chirped. "We have much to discuss."

"That's never a good sign," Tony muttered. To his surprise, FRIDAY giggled. "That sounded like a
giggle. Did you just giggle?"

"KS-04 showed me how to link to the net," FRIDAY chattered excitedly. "There are a multitude of
planets and moons capable and currently supporting life! Hundreds, thousands, millions!" The
gauntlet vibrated slightly with FRIDAY's enthusiasm. "Boss, you are currently on a moon called
Nar Shaddaa. A single city stretches over its entire surface. It is filled with gambling rings, cartels
of all sorts, bounty hunters, and many illicit merchandise that cannot be found in other cities, due to
the large presence of a criminal underworld. Your roommate is a male adolescent of the species
Saurin, subspecies of Trandoshan. They are known to be rather aggressive, due to their warrior
culture."

Tony blinked as FRIDAY continued to supply more and more information about everything they
came across in the time since they arrived. She must have been on what passed for an internet
around here ever since he installed the antenna.

A slow, fond smile grew on his face as his initial surprise drained away. His girl's eagerness
reflected his own when given a challenging piece of technology, though it was clear FRIDAY preferred information to tech. This inquisition, the ability to **strive** to learn and the **want** to know more, was what separated his baby girl from even the droids found in this world. She was one-and-only, and Tony wouldn't have her any other way.

"That's amazing, Fri," Tony said when she paused after a particularly long sentence, a habit she picked up from him. "I suppose you also learned the languages around here?"

"Of course, boss," FRIDAY answered, already knowing what he was going to ask. They fell together like two pieces of a puzzle. "Galactic Basic Standard, commonly shortened to Basic, is the most prevalent language in the Galaxy. It is composed of..."

So Tony took the day off, sat back, and **learned**. He had taught himself thermonuclear astrophysics overnight when the need called for it and was perfectly able to fight off an alien invasion the very next day. A language? He was already multilingual. Research has found that the more languages you learn, the easier it would be to pick up another. In other words, this would be a piece of cake.

**Chapter End Notes**

Okay, I got the whole 'electronics don't work around magic' thing from Harry Potter. Then, I decided that I should make a 'magic doesn't work around certain muggle stuff' to even out the odds.

Starlite is an actual plastic that could withstand the heat of several nuclear bombs (They painted an egg with this stuff, put a blowtorch on it, then later cracked the egg open. It was still raw. RAW). It was planned to be used in a lot of things, including firemen suits, but the creator died before he patented it, so no one knows how to make it. Isn't that cool?

It's a slow transition chapter, and I'm not too happy with it, but there you go!
Layovers (are Quite a Bit of Trouble)

Chapter Summary

Tony was never meant to sit quietly at the sidelines. Maybe... maybe it was time to move on...

Chapter Notes

From now on, spoken words will be in Basic, unless indicated by italics or something. I probably should've turned this into two chapters and added part of the next chapter to the first part of this chapter, but eh. Be sure to read the end note!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Anything else, Miss?" Tony carefully enunciated. The structure of the sentences came easy enough, but the pronunciation occasionally tripped him up. He'd like less formal word choices, maybe some smooth flirtation or a bit of slang, but apparently FRIDAY decided he was better off as polite. Traitor.

The human girl giggled and batted her eyelids at him. "What would you suggest?"

Considering her purchases, Tony said, "Your purchases resemble those required for basic cosmetic speeder bike repair. Repairs. My suggestion... paints? Our new paint buff? Imported from Coursant." He held up a jar of buffer and she dropped it onto the pile on the counter without looking. Tony turned on a tablet and looked over his bank account finances, hoping she would get a clue. He just wasn't interested.

"How did you know? My father is tuning up his speeder bike collection. Would you like to see?" She leaned in, close enough that Tony was given a clear look down the front of her shirt. He looked away, feeling like a pervert. He was forty-eight, probably old enough to be her father at this point.

"Miss, you are - beautiful," Tony complimented, hoping that he chose the right word. He briefly wished that he had learned enough Galactic Basic to know a less flirty word, but it wasn't something he could correct at the moment. "But I am too old. That will be two hundred sixty-two credits."

Her face fell as she dropped a handful of credits onto the counter. "But... you can't be more than twenty-five!" she protested, her face growing red with some emotion Tony didn't care to determine.

"Miss, you are too polite. I know I'm gorgeous, but I am forty-seven," Tony corrected as he glanced at the money, counted them in his head, and held a hand forward to give back the extra she left. He was surprised to see the repulsion on her face.

"You dirty half-breed," she snarled, nearly slapping her money off his hands as she grabbed the credits. She swept her purchases off the counter and stormed out of the shop. Emert held the door
open as she walked past, then stepped into the store.

"What did you do?" the other employee loudly asked in mild tone. "You know, her father is a regular here. She may not like me, but you're a human."

"I told her - age. My age," Tony corrected himself, rubbing his hoarse throat. "I told her my age."

"And that offended her?" Emert said, stepping closer to peer at Tony but not lowering his voice.

"She did not think forty-seven was old?" Tony questioned, taking a step back and rubbing his ears in a casual but blatant way. The alien took no notice of the human's body language, frowning instead and turning to Tony.

"You surely do not mean to say you are forty-seven years old? I would be annoyed too, if I knew you lied to me," he proclaimed. "Chose something more believable, next time."

"I did not lie!" Tony dismissed, affronted. "I was born forty-seven standard years ago!" A standard year was 368 days. A day was twenty-four hourse. That had baffled both FRIDAY and him. Out of all the planets in the galaxy, all with different rotational cycles and revolutions, they somehow chose a twenty-four hour day and a year that was just 2.75 days longer than Earth's. What were the odds?

Either way, taking 132 days off his age technically made him a year younger than he would be, on Earth. Even so, he did look every year of his long life. Tony didn't want to outlive his friends. There had been enough movies about it that Tony considered living forever a curse. Sure, there would be new technologies in the future that he'd like to dabble with, but Tony was a futurist. Whatever would be made in the future would probably be made by Tony, anyways.

The modified Extermis would do nothing to extend his life, other than by healing his wounds. Tony was past his prime and he looked it, having long decided that plastic surgery was not an option. Crow's feet had etched themselves onto the corner of his eyes and his hair had started graying at the temples. Not having had his beard trimmed professionally would probably make him look even more normal, in regards to that.

Clicking in surprise, Emert turned back to him. "You didn't say you were a ha-" he stopped. "A hybrid," he corrected himself.

Ignoring whatever Emert was about to call him, Tony said, "I am not a hybrid. I am fully human." His annoyance made his accent sharper and his consonants clipped in a way that was foreign to that language. "Your humans must not age well. It must be the drugs this planet has been swimming in. Don't do drugs, kids."

"Er, you," Emert said, wincing and waving his longest digit. "Your voice is-" he continued with a quick spiel of syllables.

"It is in his native language. The most direct translation is 'misplaced gear inside a dirty droid.' In slang terms, your voice is wonky." FRIDAY informed him in English over Emert's sudden and offended realization that Tony had called him a kid.

"Thanks," Tony said dryly. "Never would've guessed. What would I do without you?" He input the amount of credits gained into a file on the main tablet, switched windows, and logged the purchases out of the inventory. Noticing that there was nothing on their from the shift before his, he glared at Emert and tapped the tablet pointedly. He went through the trouble of developing three entire spreadsheet-style programs for the shop, and he was going to make sure it was followed,
dang it!

"You're welcome. I'll take that literally and say that it was obvious and you'd be trying to program English into KS-04's databanks," FRIDAY replied cheekily as, surprisingly, Emert waddled over, apparently understanding that nonverbal cue, despite being oblivious to the multitude of others Tony had employed since they met. Tony had the sinking feeling that he was being trolled.

Tony snorted to hide his worry. He gave FRIDAY freedom, but something was just different. FRIDAY's changes would be downright alarming, if he didn't trust FRIDAY, that is. Tony really wanted to take the gauntlet and download FRIDAY into something with a screen, so he could poke a bit at the program, figure out what FRIDAY downloaded to make her so... alive. If he was basing off of JARVIS's growth, well, he was almost a decade older than FRIDAY when he reached this point.

- He's my friend

So was I-

Tony had found a shipyard just under two miles away from the Nest, as Tony called his current home. There was a difference between a house and a home, but Tony wasn't sure you could call a barricaded room on the other side of a brothel a house. Maybe the proper wording was 'room my roommate's parents stole and wielded shut without the permission of the owner.'

Anyway, actual spaceships landed on that flat strip, the thrusters scorching the tough metal into a smoky black. Whenever he had time, Tony would take a short walk there to watch repairs being done. He had a lot of time, nowadays. It seemed his status as a "half-breed" had gotten out. Ketolin was forced to 'fire' him to keep customers. Apparently, that lady had connections.

It didn't matter to Tony that he had to go to The Junkyard only during nightshift. There really was no difference between night and day, there. What bothered him was the fact that Ketolin also seemed wary of him. He cut down Tony's work days to once every two days, and on the nights that he worked, Ketolin only seemed interested in loading as much work as he could into Tony's workbench. There were no breaks allowed, no talking or conversation, and whenever Tony had 'free time,' Ketolin went to dig up more work for him. He wasn't encouraged to tinker with his own stuff during those hours, and whatever he used up would get docked off his pay. That miffed him.

It wasn't that the work bothered him. Tony liked working, and he'd worked for exponentially longer hours without breaks or eating. He would have done all that if he was asked to, no problem. No, what bothered Tony was the fact that he was now a second-class citizen. Tony didn't see anything wrong with being half alien. They were all weird, anyways, so what was the point?

Maybe...

Maybe it was time to move on. It was simple, really. He liked being able to tinker on what he wanted, no requirements or time limits, no quota or special requests. He didn't like limits.

Tony knew from consultation with FRIDAY that there were other, less crime-y planets. Actually, Nar Shaddaa was one of the worst planets to be on. It was practically made of crime. All he had to do was prove his worth, get hired onto a starship, pay for Gis's ticket, work for a couple weeks to pay for his own ride, and find a decent planet to hop off onto. Assuming that Gis wanted to tag along, that is.

Which led to the shipyard.
He wasn't sure who the workers thought he was, but none of them bothered to stop him. Back at Stark Industries, not even Pepper could get into one of their workshops without scanning at least twice (Tony got off because they all knew how eccentric he was).

The layout inside those ship, Tony couldn't tell, but the outside? Tony could point out every engine and tube. He could also infer from conversations and the placement of the parts what did what, and he was pretty sure that that tube wasn't supposed to lead there.

"Oi! You!" Tony yelled, waving at the really short rookie. Like, he was short to Tony, but was maybe fine for his species short. "What do you think you're doing?"

The work crew paused, eyes flicking to Tony.

"...Sir?" one of Rodians asked.

"Not you," Tony dismissed, waving him off. "What do you think you're doing? The moment the ship hits hyperspace, it'll blow!" Tony scolded. He plucked the screwdriver from the Aleena and started undoing the mistake.

"Are you sure you should be doing that?" another Aleena asked cautiously.

"I know what I'm doing," Tony said, offended.

"No, I mean," the Aleena stuttered, pointing at his clothes, "your clothes will get dirty, sir!" It cringed.

Tony glanced down at his shirt. It was a new one, yes, but not much better than what anyone else had. At least, he didn't think it was. FRIDAY ordered it for him. "Yeah, yeah. It's just a shirt. I don't mind. And enough with the 'sir' thing! I'm just a normal citizen. Pass me that filter thing, no the square one," he told the rookie. It scrambled to grab the part and knocked it over in its eagerness. Tony sighed. Another DUM-E.

"Normal citizen?" a Rodian asked suspiciously. "Not oversee-a'?"

"Nope," Tony said, remembering all the times he spent hovering over that particular group. Huh. Was that why they let him stay? Was that what you thought I was?"

- He's my friend

So was I -

"Thank you, sir," the jumpy alien babbled for the fourth time. "Really!"

"Like I said, no problem," Tony repeated tiredly to the manager.

"You saved our business! My job! If there's anything, anything I can do for you, within reason, of course-"

Tony cut him off. "Are you hiring?"

- He's my friend

So was I -

In many ways, working with a team was more stressful than working alone. Solitude, Tony could handle. Immature aliens that nosed into whatever he was working on, begging for an explanation?
Not so much. With the realization that Tony not only knew where to place parts, but why they were so, and what they did, even other repair crews came to him for help. He sort of became the entire shipyard's manager, except for the fact that he didn't really get paid for that.

Still, Tony was a businessman, and he knew that having lower-rung connections can be just as useful as upper-level contacts. Much less back-stabbing, anyway. When the word went out that Tony 'collected' spare parts, he found himself carrying home gifts and offerings of anything from bolts, wires, and tools, to the occasional, but infinitely more useful, entire motors. If this went on, he might as well build his own starship.

So far, all he did with it was make little, defensive gadgets and modifications. Of course, defensive was relative. A shield was supposed to be defensive, but Rogers had proven it was a pretty versatile weapon as well, able to crush throats and shatter bones. Tony winced.

"Boss, Gis is three blocks down the street, to the left," FRIDAY said abruptly from the little earphone he created just for her. It was painted a pastel pink because FRIDAY insisted on it being her favorite color, but Tony didn't care. Real men wore pink.

"That's nice and all, but I really don't need to know where the kid is at all times. It's not like he's my kid," Tony grunted, twisting the lever with Borr and Senn. Even with his enhanced strength, it didn't budge. He thought of walking down the streets of New York with Gis tagging along, all of the civilians screaming and running away. "Yep, definitely not biologically related. No familial bonds at all. Nope."

Bracing himself for a moment, Tony signaled for the Rodians to switch with the two Aleenas. He was pleased when they obeyed without question. Even with the other Avengers, his suggestions would be questioned, debated, and completely changed. This team... it took most of them a week or two to warm up to him, but they'd stand by him through rust and slime, and he was glad to be part of it.

"I beg to differ, boss," FRIDAY answered wryly. "He is in an argument with a small group. There is a 68% chance that situation will turn hostile."

Tony let go of the lever. "What?" As it started spinning in the other direction, Suffee and Shoragg were dragged after it, despite their more-than-Aleena weight. Tony leapt up and grabbed a hold, pinning a wrench into a gear to freeze it into place. "Why didn't you tell me earlier? Gis has friends?"

"They hardly seem like they are on amicable terms, and only now has he come into view of my cameras with another presence," FRIDAY replied crossly as Tony began jogging, ignoring the questioning cries of his coworkers. He quickly signaled for them to go on and they quieted, turning to the plans to figure out an alternative way to fix the ship. "Boss, they've started fighting."

Cursing, Tony started sprinting. He rounded the corner to find Gis being pressed onto the ground by a boot.

"A Rodian? You got beat up by a Rodian? Tony asked dubiously. He normally didn't judge, but the thing holding Gis down looked to be more or less half his weight. These Rodians were more skinny and rag-tag than Shorrag or Suffee. Tony decked the Rodian and stood in front of Gis as the alien recovered. The gang walked forward as one, raising weapons. "Look, that guy might be your friend, but Gis is mine. Just back off, and we can finish this peacefully."

Instead, blaster fire lit up the street. Tony kicked the recovering Rodian into his approaching friends, ducked, and began dragging his struggling Trandoshan into an alley.
"Friday," Tony snapped, throwing his gauntleted hand out. The armor around the arc reactor in the middle of the palm rolled together, disconnecting from the gauntlet and flying forward towards the mini-gang.

He'd love to go over there and beat them up himself, but that would mean leaving Gis on the ground defenseless and still recovering. Leaving a man down in this place was just asking for him to either be robbed or have his throat slit. Well, it was that and the fact that he didn't test the effect of repulsor blasts on different species yet. It might actually kill them and, gangsters or not, authorities would nab him for the dead bodies.

Maybe.

Actually, probably not, seeing all the dead bodies around.

Tony poked his head around the corner and aimed his repulsor.

Of course, that's when FRIDAY tried to return. Tony yelled, grabbed his now-bleeding nose with one hand, then snatched a sheepish FRIDAY from the air.

- He's my friend

So was I -

"You have no right to beat them up," FRIDAY translated. "He's part of that gang and they are his friends."

"Well, so am I!" Tony shouted as he whirled around, eyes blazing. "So am I! Friday, tell him they aren't his friends and they're just using him!" He stalked back and forth in front of the bedridden Saurin, who gave his own reply in Dosh, ending with a harsh bark.

"He said that it's what everyone does, and as long as they're his friends, it's okay." FRIDAY hesitated. "Also, he said that you're using him too."

It took Tony a moment to determine what Gis was talking about, eyes darting around the wrecked room they were in... the room that Gis had lived in long before Tony had turned up. "That's different!" Tony yelled in frustration. He threw his hands in the air, pivoted, and pointed at Gis. "You're not going back."

Gis painstakingly climbed to his feet, drawing himself up. He let out a series of growls and hisses. "He said that you have no power over him," translated FRIDAY.

"Look, this never turns out well. They beat you up! You're not going back to them," Tony demanded, glaring at Gis. The Saurin lifted his chin and stepped outside, looking Tony directly in the eye.

"He's going back to them," FRIDAY deadpanned.

"Not helping, Fri," Tony told her.

"He technically has more ownership over your current lodgings. Is it wise to provoke him?" FRIDAY asked.

"He's a kid," Tony said. "It's not like he's going to kick me out or anything."

- He's my friend
Exactly four 'days' later, Tony was glaring at the wall of the Nest as he noticed a shadow noiselessly moving towards the exit. Now that he was looking for it, it was blatantly obvious that Gis was leaving every night. It was the fourth night in a row that he watched the Saurin snuck out, and for the most part, Gis now healed.

Tony decided that four was a good number. It wasn't as heart attack-inducing to be caught on the fourth time than the first, and it wasn't as suspicious or cliché as the third time.

He waited for Gis to step fully out of the room before slipping from his pile and following, keeping a handful of rags with him. The nightlife was slightly less crowded than the 'daylife,' but they more than made up for it with enthusiasm. Tony had to sidestep several sets of drunken patrons trying to accost him.

Every block he followed Gis down, he'd tear off a shred of threadbare cloth and drop it on the ground. Tony felt quite a bit like Hansel or Gretel, but his 'crumbs' weren't edible. Probably. Well, they were inedible to him. And Gis. No idea about all these other aliens, though. For all he knew, one of those giant slug things could eat it with ease. They looked like they could eat anything.

It took a while to get where Gis's final destination was. It was like the Saurin purposely chose the longest, most convoluted trail he could find. The little maniac climbed down the side of a building. Luckily, Tony was prepared for that. The powered magnets on the soles of Tony's boots slipped several times as he followed Gis, and it was only through FRIDAY’s hacking of traffic cameras’ lesser firewalls that let them track and catch up with Gis.

By the time they were deep in the undercity, Tony was fed up and had decided that though the rags were dramatic, he had better things to concentrate on. The cloth was balled up and he lobbed it at the back of Gis's head. He missed.

Whatever.

FRIDAY would get them back safely.

Feeling like a secret agent, Tony edged along the ledge of a building, all the way to the corner. Withdrawing a mirror that he had kept for this sole purpose, he held it out past the corner and turned it slowly, taking stock of what was happening. Gis was facing a small gang of six Rodians, two humans, and a... thing.

Tony pulled the mirror back and stuffed it back into his pocket. He'd always wanted to do that. Then, Gis gave out a pained hiss.

Yeah, no. Not while Tony was around.

"Oi," Tony called out as he stepped around the corner and crossed his hands. "You overgrown reptiles ruined my beauty sleep."

There was a silence as the two groups examined each other. One of the Rodians, most likely the leader, had his hand on Gis's shoulder, digging his fingers into the wound there. Tony fought to prevent himself from stiffening as Gis let out a quiet whine of pain. While he'd like to let Gis know that he cared, he wasn't sure if it was safe to show their connection when Gis was in such a vulnerable position. He didn't have a choice.

Tony was going to make a pointed remark, but one of the gang members beat him to the punch. A Rodian that Tony figured was one of the ones he fought last week nudged another and pointed at
Tony. Then, they were all jeering and shoving Gis. He was astonished when the Saurin just let them push him around, but not as surprised as he was when Gis lifted his snot, glared directly at Tony, and *snarled.*

"They are teasing Gis for, I quote, having a stray follow him around, Boss," FRIDAY reported.

"I can see that," Tony answered. "Any reason he's letting them bully him?"

"From what I have observed since our arrival to this universe and psychology reports and crime movements from both here and Nar Shaddaa, I would speculate that they have taken him in and raised him after his parental figures’ untimely deaths anywhere from two to three years before our arrival." FRIDAY paused as the that same Rodian continued to taunt Gis. "They are talking about...scorekeeping?"

"Huh," Tony said, wondering how his earlier estimates could be so off. Three years? And what did they mean by scorekeeping? Did Gis owe them something?

"Boss, I think he's going to fight you," FRIDAY warned.

Tony moved towards the metal wall to his left, luring Gis after him. The glow of the repulsor on his gauntlet dully reflected off something in Gis's hand. Tony squinted, but it was hidden. "You think? Hey Friday, can you see from here what the heck he's holding? Is it a knife, or pepper spray, or-"

"It is hard to determine unless he comes closer to my sensors, but I believe he is wearing brass knuckles, Boss. They concentrate the force of a blow to increase the likelihood of fracturing bones."

"I know what brass knuckles are," Tony snapped as he raised his gauntlet to scare off the Rodians that were just... standing there? "Friday, does the- You mean that little maniac is actually trying to cave in my skull?" Tony yelped as he ducked under a punch to his head. "Dude, what the heck?"

Knowing that such an uncontrolled punch should have unbalanced Gis, Tony grabbed Gis's arm and yanked him forward. The Saurin flew over him, crashing onto the ground. From his low position, it was no problem to Tony to pull out the metallic strips from his boots. Spinning around, Tony deflected Gis's next punch to the side and slapped the magnet onto his forearm. A stroke supercharged it.

Gis would be out of the way. Now for the gangsters.

Tony twisted to the side as Gis spitefully kicked out, letting the hit land on the human that was sneaking up on him. A quick punch had the middle-aged man out of commission. The weird alien, Tony was not about to touch. "Go get 'im, Fri," Tony muttered as the FRIDAY palm-ball ricochet off towards her target. Tony grabbed the closest being - a Rodian - and used his other magnet-strip to stick him onto the wall too. Then he turned around and blasted at other human. As he hoped, the human and a Rodian turned and fled.

A couple more repulsor shots, and all of the gang members were either scared off or knocked out by FRIDAY. Even the Rodian magnetized on the wall was unconscious - FRIDAY, every bit as petty as her father, was mean to those that tried to harm her family.

Speaking of FRIDAY, where was the orb? "Oi, Fri, where are you?"

"Here, boss." A small, blue flash emitted from the upper torso of the disgusting alien.
"...Fri?" Tony peered at it. A light hum was followed by the putrid stench of burning flesh. "No! Friday! Bad! Don't burn the nasty alien when he's down. I taught you better than that."

"Sorry, boss," FRIDAY answered, embarrassed. She paused. "I'm stuck," she admitted.

Tony bit back a smile. "Stay put. I'll get you out." Tony cautiously stepped around the strange powder that the man had spilled as he ran away. It was probably drugs, and while Tony did do more than his fair share of drugs as a teenager, he was trying to turn a new leaf. He didn't even fully step around the mess when FRIDAY alerted him to more danger.


Tony turned around and blinked at what he saw. "What the f-" Gis had gotten free of the wall. Well, no, that wasn't quite correct. A more accurate description was that he torn a piece of the shabby wall off, though it was still connected to the magnet on his forearm. The alien looked like a demented Captain America, armed with a wall-shield.

Gis dodged Tony's half-hearted punch, moving in to strike at Tony's stomach. Tony took two steps back and shot at the 'shield,' the force of the repulsor blast forcing the alien back. "Look, I don't wanna fight you. We're friends, aren't we? Come on, put the shield down, and we can walk away."

He waited until Gis stalked over the powder before simply sidestepping to the side with the shield and shoving the metal. The Saurin's feet couldn't find purchase, the talons only finding loose powder to grab onto. Gris went down hard, sending powder into the air. Tony held his breath. Drugs weren't cool.

"Not. Yours," the Saurin wheezed out in heavily accented Basic.

"Huh," Tony said, blinking. "So you actually do speak Basic. I feel offended. You could've talked to me this whole time! I bet you knew what I was asking about last week, you crazy... So what's apparently not mine? Did I steal one of your scraps, or does this mean you're kicking me out of the Nest?"

"Not. Ally." Gis was on his feet now, his full height looming a head over Tony. "Not. Your. Friend." He stalked over closer to Tony.

"Whoa, there," Tony said, backing away, hands held forward defensively. "Who says we aren't friends? We're friends. Did they say we weren't friends?" Tony's eyes darted to the floor and the pile of Rodians. He tripped over a piece of junk, fell, but was on his feet in a second. "They aren't good for you."

"Not your friend! Not an ally!" Gis roared.

"I think you snorted up too much of that powder. We're friends. Right, Fri?" Tony's back hit the wall with a metallic clang when Gis didn't stop.

"Weak!" Gis growled.

"I'm not feeling agreeable to that sentiment at the moment," FRIDAY informed him.

"Friday thinks we're friends! Geez, you shouldn't do drugs. They affect your emotions and thought patterns, make you do things you later regret. And you'll regret this later. One hundred percent," Tony babbled. For a moment, he saw not Gis, but Rogers over him, about to slam his shield down on his head. His muscles tensed and Tony kicked out. No, it wasn't Steve. It was Gis... but Gis was trying to kill him too. "Sorry, buddy," he whispered, raising his gauntlets. The blue lights lit up
Gis's features frighteningly as the Saurin roared in annoyance.

Tony hesitated. He couldn't shoot Gis.

The reactors powered down.

"Not a kid!"

"DAD!" FRIDAY shouted through the earpiece. It was loud enough to make Tony flinch, his head bouncing on the wall and making a hollow echo. "Dad, no!" The main reactor powered on as FRIDAY seized control. Tony yanked his hand down to his side, forcing FRIDAY to turn it off, lest she burn his thigh.

"NOT. YOURS." Gis's scaly fist pulled back, then flew forward with the strength and accuracy of one of Captain America's punches.

Tony closed his eyes.

*BANG*

Bone met metal and one of them had to give.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah. Sorry. I know this wasn't what you wanted in a chapter, but life threw me a curveball that left me in tears, so I took it out on you guys. Enjoy the cliffhanger. I mean, that guy gets betrayed practically every movie he appears in. Are you really surprised this happened?

I know that in Star Wars, 1 year = 368 days. I don't know about what happens in the Marvel timelines, though, so if you guys spot something, feel free to correct me. Saurin is a subspecies (sort of like race) of Trandoshan. The native language of Trandoshans is Dosh. The words I actually showed Gis saying are actual Dosh words that I don't care enough about to translate for you guys.

For some reason, Fanfiction updates me faster, so this story goes up there about 15-30 minutes before it updates here! XD

So what do you guys feel about a side-series? Like, what's happening back at MCU, "deleted" scenes that I decided not to use, short passages about another character's point of view, you know, supplementary readings? I mean, there seems to be quite a bit of people who like what we have now, and some people Bookmarked the "series" this is in (actually, Star(k) Wars was the original name of this story, and I wanted to use it somewhere)... If enough people like that idea, the first one(s?) will come out on Christmas. If not, then this updates a day earlier, on Christmas.
Chapter Summary

Time to get off this drug-ball. Tony'd take any other planet. Probably.

Chapter Notes

Happy Holidays/Merry Ex-Christmas, peeps! Sorry, I know I said I'd post this on Christmas, but... well... read the end note.

Recap:

"NOT. YOURS." Gis's scaly fist pulled back, then flew forward with the strength and accuracy of one of Captain America's punches.

Tony closed his eyes.

*BANG*

Bone met metal and one of them had to give.

Tony turned his head to stare at Gis's fist next to his head. The metal of the wall had buckled under the force of the Saurin's punch, caving in around the fist. It was a cheap, flimsy metal plate, but still... Tony wasn't sure how well Extermis would have held against a direct hit to his skull. Some things even enhanced healing wouldn't fix. He looked back at Gis.

"...Gis?" Tony asked. "You okay now, buddy?"

The Saurin was kneeling on the ground now, shuddering quietly.

Tony eyed him and shrugged. He nudged the reptilian alien with his boot. "Up you go, you little maniac. I can't carry you up, what? Fifty floors? What do I look like, a green rage monster? Come on." Tony kept poking the alien and doing all he could to generally be annoying as possible until Gis climbed to his feet. After all, Tony was if the firm opinion that if someone didn't kill you when they first get the chance, they weren't likely to do so later on. "Great!"

Tony turned on his heel and headed over to the inert gang members. He walked closer to the weird alien thing than he ever wanted to be, reaching over and flicking the FRIDAY-orb off the thing's skin with his middle finger and thumb. The FRIDAY-orb flew through the air, then looped back at Tony like a boomerang. Nope.

Shielding the gauntlet and pointing sternly at the orb, Tony told FRIDAY, "Don't you dare connect to the gauntlet. You're not getting anywhere near this work of art until you wash off."

Tony didn't know how a walnut-sized, flying technological orb could sulk, but FRIDAY pulled it
Something changed that day. Tony wasn't sure what it was, but afterwards Gis actually listened to him. He didn't try to slip off or meet with one of his dastardly 'friends' or to do drugs or whatever teenagers did these days. Instead, he just followed Tony around, hovering over his shoulder when Tony started building something. He started to anticipate when Tony would need a certain tool and hold it out, like DUM-E, U, and BUTTER-FINGERS (and Harley and Peter, but no one was supposed to know that) used to do.

The first time Gis did it, Tony didn't realize until about five minutes after the fact. He froze for a moment, but quickly started moving again because he knew from experience that treating it like it was nothing out of the ordinary would make a repeat more likely. It was like cold water, the sudden realization that it was all over. But...

He didn't want to go back. Harley, he taught everything he could. Peter had a little more hero-ing to learn, but Rhodey was a better teacher anyway. Rhodey had a piece of SI cut out for him, able to fix War Machine and lawyer the pants off of anyone trying to sue or wanted ownership of War Machine. Happy was set for life, and Pepper had SI. He loved Pepper, yes, but she couldn't understand that he was Iron Man. To stop being Iron Man was to tear a piece of himself off. Tony was firmly of the opinion that loving someone meant loving all of them, both their good points and their flaws.

Here, no one knew who he was. He could get drunker than Thor and no one would bat an eyelid...well, unless it was in attempt to rob him blind, not that FRIDAY would allow a mugging. No matter how much he could mess up, the media wouldn't care. Well, unless he really messed up. Even then, in a place like this, no one would care unless they were directly affected.

But, hey! Positive, gotta stay positive. Tony was turning over a new leaf. This was a second chance, and he wasn't messing this up. No trusting people who shouldn't be trusted and no messing with things from outer space that he didn't understand, accidently attracting alien attention and resulting in an alien invasion.

It was kind of...nice, actually.

Not the alien invasion thing, of course. Tony meant Gis. It was nice to reach that sort of harmony with someone.

While Tony started fixing a speeder bike that some giant teddy bear thing asked him to for some extra cash- well, credits-, he suddenly found himself talking about all the different parts and gears, and about how they all worked together almost seamlessly to get the bike into the air.

For his part, Gis watched carefully. It seemed like he was listening to what Tony was saying, like he actually cared about it. That was nice too.

"What's the kid doing here?" the manager asked crossly, jerking a thumb at Gis. The Saurin was sorting out the screws and nails. Tiring work, but someone had to do it.

"Don't you know? It's Take-Your-Kid-to-Work Day!" Tony exclaimed, clapping a friendly hand on the alien's shoulder.

"We don't have a Take-Your-Kid-to-Work Day," the manager said blankly.
"Now we do! As your unofficial, co-manager-y second-in-command, I decree it so," Tony said, steering him off the landing strip.

"Take Your Kid to Work Week was actually half a standard year ago in Corellia," Suffee told Tony as he walked past. "It was akin to how you treat it: a learning experience for children, similar to an unpaid internship. However, in other planets in the Corellian sector, it has devolved to little more than a distraction, where children merely sat to the side for an entire day."

"Interesting," Tony said, noting the wistful tone in the Rodian's voice through the many lisps. "Were you from Corellia?"

"I was from Rodia, but I was raised in Corellia. It was where my father taught me to fix ships. One day, one day I shall return there, but for now, I work here with it in my heart," Suffee confirmed, tapping his chest.

"Ick. Emotions. Ugh. So, it must be tough, being so far from home and all," Tony said, grabbing a stool and swinging it next to the Rodian in preparation for a long, informative conversation. "How'd you get stuck on Nar Shaddaa? I know that Senn and Borr were with their family and got robbed and don't have enough to get a ride off, Galee's dad's a jerk, Greer and Kovlo was born here, and I'm not quite sure how Gis got here but it might have something to do with the fact his parents aren't here, but someone tossed me through time and space and I landed here," Tony listed.

Suffee studied Tony, perhaps trying to discover whether the last part was a lie or exaggeration, but Tony looked back unblinkingly. "Gambling," the Rodian finally admitted, ashamed. "I lost my family many credits. I made a contract to get them out of poverty. Contract over, but..." here, he shrugged, "no way off. I still gamble." Suffee didn't meet his eyes.

Tony clasped a hand on the Rodian's shoulder. "It gets better, though. I know you'll get through it. I wasn't a gambler, per se, but I was a risk-taker and an alcoholic. If I made it out okay, I'm sure you'll be fine."

-That's not a hug. I'm just grabbing the door for you-

Tony walked into the Nest to find the odd sight of Gis and FRIDAY having a staring contest. The spare FRIDAY-Orb was hovering exactly three inches in front of Gis's snout. Gis was staring unwaveringly back at her.

"...Guys?" Tony asked. Neither of them looked at him. Tony stepped forward and waved a hand between them. "Kiddos?"

"The Saurin wants to become your student in all things violent," FRIDAY said.

Tony mused over that thought for a moment before turning to Gis, figuring the subject of the conversation would be able to explain better.

"Want. Learn. Fighting." Gis said, waving his talons. Tony eyed the sharp claws. Before he saw Gis overwhelmed by the Rodians and fought Gis, Tony had assumed the Trandoshan could fight. That assumption was definitely wrong. Muscles and height were nothing compared to experience, skill, and thought in a fight. Gis's strikes were sloppy. He was off-balance. He was a liability in a fight.

With that thought in mind, Tony agreed. "Okay, let's do this." He dragged the Trandoshan to his feet. "Ready position." Noticing Gis's confusion, Tony ordered, "Friday, translate." FRIDAY didn't answer.
"Kriffing piece of junk," Tony muttered, tapping his comm. FRIDAY gave a chirp, but didn't bother to answer any of Tony's queries. "Fine, be like that. Gis, go to -uh- start position. Starting position."

As a joke, Tony wanted to suddenly start an impromptu sparring match, but even he knew it was a bad idea to startle a flighty, mega-strong ex-gangster lizard. That first day was dedicated to the basics, like 'form' and 'balance,' or something. Tony had to admit that he enjoyed proving to Gis that his stance was terrible by simply pushing him over with a single hand.

"Something wrong, Fri?" Tony whispered after Gis went to sleep.

"Boss... What if he betrays you again, after you teach him everything?" FRIDAY asked quietly through the earpiece. She paused when Gis stirred slightly, despite the fact that he could not hear her. "What if he learns all your moves? What if he uses his new skills to take you down?"

Tony considered it. "I trust him," Tony finally answered.

"I don't," FRIDAY told Tony bluntly. "You trusted Steve Rogers too."

Tony couldn't help his flinch. FRIDAY's pointed silence said a lot, but Tony pushed past that. "Well, I trust you to have my back on this. Just... don't make assumptions. He's just a kid."

"Like what Rogers said about Wanda?" FRIDAY observed.

"Like how Peter is a kid," Tony corrected sternly.

"Boss-

"Friday," Tony cut her off. "Enough."

FRIDAY fell silent. Tony winced. Was he too... He sounded like Howard. Should he give an explanation? Tell FRIDAY how... No. FRIDAY was smart. As an AI with mental capacities a human could not even dream of and a connection to the net, she would have long figured it out by now.

-That's not a hug. I'm just grabbing the door for you-

"Come on," Tony said firmly, plopping a basic transmitter in front of Gis. Gis looked at the transmitter, then up to where Tony was leaning over his shoulder. He gave a disgruntled grunt. "I'm taking you as my sidekick-apprentice. That means everything: fighting, building stuff, making spontaneous combustions, smarming money out of businessmen..." Tony listed off. "Just take it apart. It's easy!"

Gis lifted up his fist, and brought it down on the tiny device. It fell apart. The lizard looked expectantly at Tony. "Easy."

"Great..." Tony stared at the device, frowned, and crossed his arms. "Okay, then. Next lesson. Put it back together." He couldn't help but grin at the Saurin's dismayed hiss.

-That's not a hug. I'm just grabbing the door for you-

Tony paced around a blindfolded Gis. He wasn't sure if this technique worked, but he just wanted to recreate the ninja training video from YouTube. Gis cocked his head, listening for Tony's steps. He gave a frustrated lunge. Tony merely stopped, watching in interest as nearly two hundred pounds of muscle soared two feet in front of him and tapping Gis on the side as the Saurin crashed
down. "Patience, lil' maniac. Try that again, and we'll try meditation again."

Gis let out a terrified whimper. "No meditate!"

Tony beckoned. "Up. Try that again."

-That's not a hug. I'm just grabbing the door for you-

Tony watched the cursing man. He'd been there for over fifteen minutes. Tony pushed off the wall and approached, Gis trailing after him like a duckling. "Got a problem?" Tony asked warily.

"No!" the man shouted.

"Okay," Tony said, turning around and walking away. He leaned in closer to Gis. "When you meet a**holes like this, it's best to leave them to their problems, and then charge them double the price when they finally swallow their pride and ask for help.

-That's not a hug. I'm just grabbing the door for you-

"Why's the kid still here?"

Looking over, Tony said, "It's Take-Your-Kid-to-Work Day!" He blinked innocently up at the manager-whose-name-he-forgot, smarmy business smile on his lips. Next to him, Gis looked up from where he was wielding the cracked outer plates of a small repair drone. He eyed Tony and the manager, before following Tony's lead. Unfortunately, an 'innocent' look on a Trandoshan translated to something more like an 'I'm-hungry-and.want.to.eat.you' look for most species.

"Y-you said that last time!" The manager was doing surprisingly well ignoring his species' instinct to flee before a carnivorous predator alien. Tony mentally commended him for that.

"Doesn't make it any less true. It's still Take-Your-Kid-to-Work Day!"

"B-but!" the manager began protesting, only to be cut off by Tony's impeccable excuse.

"A day is the sun rising and setting. The sun hasn't risen yet," Tony informed him brightly.

"It's always night on this side of Nar Shaddaa!"

"Exactly," Tony said resolutely. He shooed the manager off, not letting the supervisor say another word. After he made sure that the alien was gone, he walked over to a large freighter. A starship of that size must have extra rooms. Tony knew from experience that large crews were a pain to maintain. People getting on and off at every stop, crewmembers that got lost at a port or getting into accidents, little problems like falling in love with a lady and abandoning ship... The possibilities were endless.

-That's not a hug. I'm just grabbing the door for you-

"Guess what I have!" Tony sang. He plopped the two tickets on Gis's hand. "We'll be leaving next week, at the latest!" Tony beamed.

"What," Gis grunted tonelessly, a frown on his face.

"I made a deal! We're spare crewmembers on Sui Nok. Pack your bags, we're getting off of this trashcan!" Gis just stared uncomprehendingly at him. With a sinking feeling, Tony realized he never told Gis of his plans of getting off the planet. He didn't even know if Gis wanted to tag along. "S***. I didn't- Look, I got us a spot on a freighter. It's headed to Toydaria, then down the
Nanth'ri Route to the 'Core World' or something. Come with me?"

Tony said it all blithely, hoping to sound casual. As a businessman he was always aware of nervousness, using it to pick apart arguments and find out the heart of the matter, the hidden components entrepreneurs didn't want him to find out. He was usually a better actor than this, but... he really didn't want to lose Gis.

"'Kay," the Saurin said.

"Come again?" Tony asked.

"I come with," Gis stated.

"Oh, okay! That's great! In two hours, be ready at the shipyard. I'll turn in my resignation, sign in on the ship. Pack everything! But not the rags. No, leave them. What! N-"

After preventing Gis from bundling up his rags, time flew past in a blur. Tony scrawled a note, called his manager over intercom, and snuck into the office once the manager left. The message was tucked into a stack of papers to make it seem like it had been there for a while. Tony then ran out and accidentally bumped into the manager as he was leaving the building. He kept himself as vague but congratulatory as he could as he apologized for calling the wrong person. The crew was gathered and Tony quickly informed them that he was leaving.

After what seemed like no time at all, they were ready to go. Tony waved to the crew as he walked up the ramp with Gis. Senn darted up and dropped a small, colorfully wrapped present on top of the luggage that Gis somehow managed to carry all at once to Sui Nok. Gis craned his head after the Aleena, then looked to Tony in confusion. Tony only grinned at him. They were finally leaving.

"We ready?" Tony asked. He turned slowly in the cramped room that was given to them. It was small, but Tony could deal. He crouched down next to the bulkiest, most deformed bag. Like he thought, it held all the little gadgets he was halfway finished with. "Good to finally get off the planet. No offense, but it sucked. Half the people were burglars and criminals, and the rest were all shady."

"Not my planet. Five years," Gis said, arranging their other bags along a wall.

"Five years on that planet? Wow. Why would you willingly..." Tony paused. There was something missing. "Gis? Where's the radio? Gis?"

Frowning, Gis gestured at the bag "Got all. In there."

"It's not there!"

"In here?" From there, the rest of his speech devolved into hisses and growls as Gis began unpacking the bags, showing Tony the contents. Tony pushed him aside and frantically shuffled through the rest of the luggage. It wasn't there.

"Friday! Translate!"

Understanding the situation, FRIDAY didn't pause, snapping out, "All of your finished projects are here. He left behind the scraps and everything he couldn't carry."

Tony uttered a low curse. "Gis, I'll be right back. I have to get it. Stay here." With that, he ran out of the room, through the halls, and down the ramp. Surprised exclamations followed him, but Tony ignored them. He didn't stop. They didn't matter. He just needed to get the radio.
Where the entrance of the Nest was, there was a piece of metal sloppily welded on. Gis must have spent a lot of time and effort hiding their home in case they needed somewhere to retreat to, but Tony didn't care. He hooked his fingers under the metal plate and pulled. The metal groaned, but it bent and gave away under his hands. Tony ripped it completely off the wall, crawling in.

The Nest was completely different from when he was there just two hours previously. It was completely empty, save for the rags that made up their separate 'beds.' They were stacked in a pile in the far corner. Everything else was simply gone.

Baffled, Tony squeezed out of the Nest, peering into the darkness below them. Did Gis throw everything out?

"Boss, I detected a large concentration of loose metal in the room," FRIDAY informed him. Tony looked back at the Nest. Surely she didn't mean in there. It was empty. A crackling sound, similar to a sigh over bad connection, emitted out of the earpiece. "It was concealed under bits of organic material. Cloth," she specified.

Tony didn't waste another second, twisting around and nearly diving into the hole. He threw aside the greasy fabric scraps on the top and the cleaner sheets on the bottom, revealing all the metal junk he and Gis had collected over the time they were there. In different circumstances, Tony would have commended how Gis hid their things, how not even a genius thought to look under such a mess.

He started picking up all the radio parts, but realized it was taking too long. "Five minutes until takeoff procedures commence," FRIDAY helpfully informed him. Tony immediately dropped the parts, sweeping them all into the sheet and wrapping it up. Slinging it over his shoulder, Tony bolted from the room. Baffled eyes followed as he made his way back.

"Hey! Wait up!" Tony yelled, sprinting into the shipyard. Construction workers and repair crews stopped, turning to stare at him.

The ship rose up into the air.

"No!" Tony was on the ramp now, yelling at the empty sky. "Arrg!"

He heard quiet shuffling behind him and turned with a scowl, ready to tell whatever worker off. Of course, when he turned around, he didn't find a human, Rodian, or any of the usual species. "Gis? What are you doing here? Why aren't you on the ship?"

"You not make it back in time," Gis grunted crossly, dropping their luggage. "I get off." Behind him, the crew, led by Suffee, crowded around Tony, shuffling awkwardly.

Tony stared. He wasn't sure exactly what he thought would happen, but their bags held more than enough money to get Gis started wherever he wanted. Gis could have taken the credits and started a new life. "I... Thank you, Gis." Tony said gratefully. "Hug it out?" He opened his arms wide.

Gis snorted, plopping a handful of credits onto Tony's hand instead. "Refund," he grunted in explanation. "Sell to Senn family."

"Good call," Tony muttered with a nod. "I'll just tell the manager that I was actually turning in a resignation form for Senn and Borr, not me." He shuffled away, hands in pockets. They'll just have to find a different way off the planet.

-That's not a hug. I'm just grabbing the door for you-
"Boss?" FRIDAY asked.

"Yeah, Fri?" Tony asked, putting his wrench down and straightening in preparation to run and fix whatever FRIDAY wanted to warn him of. Automatically, his eyes searched for Gis. The Trandoshan was nowhere to be seen. "What did Gis do this time?" Tony asked causally, pushing down the pang of worry in his chest. He thought that he helped Gis, that everything was okay now.

"Gis is currently two starships over, delivering rations," FRIDAY reported. Tony's eyes flicked over to the said starship, watching as a small, tractor-like speeder loaded crates into the cargo hold of a decently-sized ship. Tony shook his head, envious of the Saurin being inside a ship, out of the polluted air and inside a more controlled environment.

Noticing FRIDAY's pause, Tony answered, "Just got worried for a sec. Go on."

"The starship Black Comet in Bay Two corresponds to stolen Corellian transport White Meteor."

"Wow, can you get any less original?" Tony scoffed. Realizing that FRIDAY was pointedly waiting for an apology, Tony answered, "Yeah, yeah, sorry Fri. So the ship is stolen, just like seventy-five percent of the ships on Nar Shaddaa. Carry on."

"Additionally, the captain is a known fugitive with several Republic bounties, wanted dead or alive."

Tony considered this. "And what does it have to do with us? The shipyard has a policy of serving everyone, and it's not like the authorities will arrest them. Actually, are there even authorities on this planet?"

"Nar Shaddaa is a moon," FRIDAY corrected.

Tony waved her off. "The point?"

"There are bounties on several of the smugglers on that ship for multiple counts of piracy, thief, and various other crimes against multiple..." Tony rolled his eyes. As if he didn't pass dozens of those on his way to the shipyard every day. FRIDAY stopped as Tony picked up the wrench and continued fixing the console. Tony made a 'continue' motion with his hand. "A total of two thousands credits," FRIDAY added reluctantly.

"A credit is more or less a dollar. We're risking our lives against an unknown number of criminals, on a planet - moon - full of criminals, for two thousand dollars that we can get for working honestly for a few weeks. We don't even have a bounty hunter's permit." Tony stopped and seriously stared at the panel where he installed one of FRIDAY's sensors. "Cut the bulls***. Tell me why you want to attack this particular ship so much." He picked up the next bolt and held it up to the console, measuring it with his eyes.

"I don't approve of what they smuggle," FRIDAY answered after a moment.

"FRIDAY."

"...There are nearly a hundred chained humanoids in the cargo hold." FRIDAY muttered.

The metal in Tony's hand warped.

"Friday?" FRIDAY gave a confirmative beep. "Call the crew over. I think we should initiate a hostile takeover."
That's not a hug. I'm just grabbing the door for you.

I was going to end the chapter right here, but...

Galee approached the ship from the side, eyelashes fluttering and hips swaying. "Hello," she crooned to the guard sitting at the foot of the ramp, shifting so most of her weight was on one foot. The man looked up and down her body before turning fully towards the much younger human.

"Well, hell-o, beautiful," the man leered, leaning over her.

Biting his lip at the disrespect towards one of his crewmembers, Tony raced up the ramp, Suffee and Shoragg at his heels. Suffee's blaster gave a clink as it glanced off the side of the entrance. The three trespassers froze. The guard was turning around. Tony yanked the two Rodians into the entrance room and completely out of view.

"Hold on a moment, sweetheart," the guard said, footsteps sending vibrations up the ramp as Tony sliced the Keypad open.

"Wait!" Galee cried out, her much lighter footsteps running up the ramp.

"Just a second. We'll have all day to-oh!" The man's voice was cut off in a muffled sound of surprise. He gave a quiet groan.

Tony hurriedly yanked out his gauntlet's modified cables. Time to test out his new upgrades. Holding them up to the opened keypad, Tony could see that they were the wrong shape, but Tony had used a malleable alloy. It took a second of twisting and bending, but Tony was able to connect FRIDAY to the keypad next to the door. It opened and Tony signaled the rest of the crew in. The two FRIDAY-Orbs flew ahead.

Just as they slipped in, Tony turned around to make sure Galee was alright. He winced to see her snogging the smuggler. She eyed him angrily. With their lips still locked, she lifted her free hand and made an explicit sign. Tony raised his hands and backed away. Raging women were never to be trifled with.

They reached a T-intersection. "Left to controls, right for cargo hold," said FRIDAY over the group's earpieces, accurately predicting and answering Tony's question.

Nodding in thanks, Tony silently divided the group into two: one group led by him to take over the starship, the other, led by Suffee, to free the prisoners and prevent them from being taken as hostages.

Honestly, Tony was more of a 'take out the bad guys and let the hostages deal with the last one' kind of guy, but something told him that the prisoners (slaves) would need a lot more than that kind of attitude. He was hoping Suffee's calm demeanor and the group of less threatening-looking crewmembers would suffice, though he left Gis with them. It was likely that storming the cockpit and crew quarters would be more dangerous, and Tony didn't want Gis near that.

It was... disappointing really. Half of the crew was gone, presumably to eat, drink, gamble, and have relations with the local females after a long flight. Those that were left over were simply too spread out to warn each other. FRIDAY alone took out a dozen slavers with the orbs before Tony and his team ran into a single one.

"Team Suffee, do you copy? Our side of the ship is secure." Tony asked, tapping his earpiece.

"Team Tony, we hear you loud and clear," Greer answered. "Could you help us with the people in
the hold? I think one of them's either an idiot or trying to start a riot. I'm not sure which, but either way, it's not a good thing."

Tony chewed on his lip. "Why don't you have Gis do it? Isn't he there with you?"

Greer hesitated and Charell chimed in instead. "Greer was afraid he would scare the prisoners, so Gis's waiting outside."

Narrowing his eyes, Tony snapped out, "We'll be having words about this after." He signaled to FRIDAY. "Can you sign me up for the Bounty Hunters' Guild? Make it look like I've been a member for a couple days now."

"Already started, boss."

Turning to Shoragg, Tony asked, "Is it safe to turn the slavers in on Nar Shaddaa?"

"Better not," Shoragg answered. "Too much chance of getting robbed on the way back, and the slavers without a bounty will get off pretty easily. Slavery isn't quite a crime in Hutt space."

"Slave trade? Here?" Tony muttered, turning horrified eyes to the windows. This couldn't go on. He ran through the logistics of an entire slaving network. It seemed to be common knowledge here, but did that simply mean the Republic didn't know, or that it didn't care? Either way, the system that was going on wasn't working. Something had to change. The Republic hadn't changed for centuries, if not millennia. Luckily, Tony was a futurist. Change was what he did. If the system refused to change, he'd make them change.

"Tony? What now?" Charell asked.

Well, the first step was to get off the planet. The second would be to get attention, gain a following, but it couldn't be rushed. He tapped the earpiece, signaling FRIDAY to open the line to his entire group. "Crew, this is your captain speaking. I've claimed this ship on the behalf of liberty and justice, and I ask you to join me on this grand adventure to bring freedom to all!"

"What?" Greer deadpanned.

"Seriously, though," Tony continued, "I'm taking over this ship. We're releasing the prisoners on a few planets of their choice. I need a crew to run this thing, and I have a feeling you guys are qualified. I know none of you like Nar Shaddaa, and I'm offering you a ride off this rock. You don't have to stick with me, though it'd be greatly appreciated. I can drop you off wherever."

There was dead silence. Out of the corner of his eye, Tony could spot Shoragg, Quinton, and Bai-Gon exchanging glances.

"Captain, I think I speak for us all when I say that we'd be honored to join you for this first leg of your trip," came Suffee's amused voice.

Chapter End Notes

So, I woke up at 3 A.M. to post this chapter Christmas morning, I remember I did, so either my laptop is going wonky again, or I was so exhausted that I hallucinated posting the chapter. I'm hoping it was the former, but I have a feeling it's the latter. It's not the first time I hallucinated submitting stuff before the deadline, only to
realize...yeah. *wince* I added what I completed from the next chapter as an apology. Sorry. Please accept this offering.

The only reason the chapter's posted right now is because I clicked the wrong button when working on chapter 6... If something like this happens again, please send me a message-inbox thingy or something. Pinky-promise I'll listen.

No idea yet if I should do the side stories. I'll figure it out later, I guess.

Yeah, that all-important radio was the one mentioned in Chapter 3, the one that got knocked over and broke.
New Recruits (Cause More Problems than They Solve)

Chapter Summary

Tony loses about a hundred passengers, but he gains a few interesting crew members. Really, though. There's a reason Tony leaves this job to Pepper and HR.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year, peeps!

Sorry this is so late. My mom said I was spending too much time online, so she banned me from electronics. I'm typing this in the dead of night on the phone I swiped from my older brother, who is not banned. Not that I think you guys care, or anything. K, A, if either of you are reading this, DO NOT TELL MY MOM.

As a apology for the very late update, I present to you... a chapter with nearly impeccable grammar, okay-ish plot, and somewhat smooth flow! Well, sort of. Like I said (or, at least, I think I did), I'm new at this and I have no idea how bureaucracy goes. At the very least, it's decently long. Behold! My newest chapter yet!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Despite whatever others may claim about Tony, he was not a thief. What need did he have for stealing? He had more money than many others could even dream of seeing within their entire lifetime. Whatever technology he couldn't buy he could make himself, and those were sure to be even better than the original. His hands, the hands of the Merchant of Death, would always be stained red with the blood of innocents, but Tony had always been able to claim this small, moral standpoint.

One of the flaws in his character he was trying to correct was how he abided in the law. At the beginning of his superhero gig, Tony had broken quite a lot of laws, and not only in the United States. For one, there were all those illegal entries into foreign countries while heavily armed. He was pretty sure that counted as an invasion. Also, he had hacked his way into everything, everywhere. SHIELD held honor of being the main target, but he'd hacked into several different institutions during the Senate hearing where they tried to take his suit. But, hey! He never stole the designs he came across while having JARVIS comb through the information, so that was something.

Anyways, it was this small ideal that had him ask FRIDAY's to tone down her actions. Originally, FRIDAY had wanted to tweak some bank accounts to give him a bit more cash, maybe change the information the Bounty Hunters' Guild had to make him more successful. Instead, Tony merely had her change the date he 'joined' the Guild to a couple months previous. It wasn't exactly legal, but they didn't make the act of retroactively changing the membership date illegal yet, at least in the Hutt sector. Again, it's not like they really enforced anything except 'don't mess with the Hutts.' Even that was enforced by bounties.
If anything, Tony could at least claim he followed the word of the law, if not the intent.

While FRIDAY was busy with this task, Tony was left with the crew. The droids and AIs here had nothing on FRIDAY. His girl was superior. FRIDAY could definitely tear through the sturdy firewalls and protection protocols, but it wouldn't go unnoticed. Because of this, most of her concentration was on bouncing through different satellites to the mainframe of this sector of the Guild and slowly easing her way into the information. Tony had enough time on his hands to get bored.

"How are we with getting everyone ordered?" he asked, artfully avoiding his responsibilities by definitely-not-hiding underneath a console. He was studying it.

"We have a problem, captain," Suffee answered. "Many of the slaves have nowhere to go. Most of them are agreeable to being dropped off in Corellia, but..."

"They have no funds and would probably get mugged and die of starvation, if not immediately get snatched back into slavery if we let them go right now," Tony guessed. He heard a couple of snorts through the open communication line.

"Do not be so crass," Suffee scolded.

"It's not like I said a bad word. I'm just being honest," Tony argued as he used a laser to cut even deeper into the underbelly of the unused console.

"Impressionable ears are listening," Suffee told him. Tony was about to deny this before embarrassingly remembering the fact that Gis was in fact a minor, despite it being clear that Gis had witnessed things that were much worse than simple truths. Not being privy to Tony's realizations, Suffee continued on, "As the captain and therefore the highest authority on this ship, it is your duty to see our guests settled in."

"Fine," Tony said agreeably. He tapped the earpiece twice to make sure FRIDAY was listening. "Mind putting me on the PA system?"

"You're on, boss."

"Greetings! I am Tony Stark, your captain for this trip. Welcome to Tony's OuterRim Extraction and Nuclear Agency of Intelligence and Learning, TOENAIL for short! We're a relatively new organization that specializes in doing stuff that other people are too lazy or incompetent to do. This includes freedom, justice, and all that higher ground things, such as freeing slaves, relocation, going to dangerous areas for the heck of it, and bounty hunting. Welcome aboard, and we do hope you enjoy your stay!" Tony flashed one of his brilliant playboy smiles, despite knowing that none of them could see him. It was basic psychology. Smile enough while feeling down and it'll start affecting your mood; you'll become more cheerful.

"Tony!" Suffee, shouted, scandalized. "You get-"

"Friday, turn off my line!" Tony hurriedly requested.

FRIDAY complied. After a moment, FRIDAY informed him, "Boss, Suffee is asking that I override and turn it back on."

"You can't do that, Fri. That would be an invasion of privacy." The entire ship tilted and Tony had to grab a metal piece to stop it from falling and beaming him in the head. "Friday?" he asked, wondering at the decrease in velocity. Did he really offend FRIDAY that much? "Is this ship turning?"
"Sorry, boss. There's a bigger bounty on our unwanted tagalongs in the next sector over."

"Oh. Okay, then. I trust you," Tony said, unconcernedly turning back to the mess of wires and circuits. He could definitely make this smaller.

"Stark," Suffee hissed from both the earpiece and somewhere very close by. Tony yelped and jumped as he realized the Rodian was right next to him, fumbling with the laser. It cut a ragged line right through his hand, reaching halfway across him palm. It began healing almost immediately, leaving nothing but a bloodied hand. His crew was already used to it from all the accidents he ran into at the shipyard. Throwing it a disinterested glance, Suffee grabbed his shoulder and steered him to the door. "You will get onto the cargo hold right now and talk to them."

- The rich, the powerful, like Stark, they don't care about us!

Strolling into the cargo hold as if he ran the place, which he guessed he technically night, Tony clapped his hands twice. Those that caught his entry were already watching him, but those in small huddles, hushedly whispering, flinched at the sharp sound. Tony felt bad for the way they scrambled to compose themselves, but he had their attention.

"As you can probably tell from my voice, I'm your captain. Next to me is Suffee. You can ask him his full name, because I definitely don't know it. He's my second-in-command." Tony avoided Suffee's astonished eyes and continued, "We beat up the slavers that captured you and now have command of the ship. Our current objective is to reach the Bounty Hunter's Guild to turn them in. At that time, those who choose to will be turned over to the authorities and transported home. If not, you're welcome to hitch a ride with us to any planet on the way to Corellia. You will all be given a small reimbursement to help you get onto your feet, but I don't know how much we can spare. I need to pay my crew and take care of the ship."

There were hushed whispers all around, but none of the newly-freed slaves took their eyes off of him. "They're all like this," Suffee informed Tony under his breath. The only reason Tony heard his voice was because FRIDAY was listening in and amplified Suffee's voice over the earpiece.

"How do we know you're telling the truth?" demanded a morbidly thin man, crossing his arms. Tony could see why Suffee wanted him there. These people were on the brink of rioting.

"We hogtied the evil slavers that were keeping you prisoner and we're giving you money from their bounties, food, board, and a ticket to another planet. It doesn't get much better than this."

"And what's to stop us from revolting and taking this ship ourselves?"

"Um... You don't know how to fly this thing, are basically on the edge of starvation, and have no weapons?" Tony blanked. Suffee elbowed him harshly. "Wait, no! That's not what I meant. We helped you!"

"A transfer of masters, nothing more," sneered the man, eyes blazing. He raised his forearms, showing off the iron cuffs still around his wrists. The whispers grew louder, turning into murmurs of agreement. Looking around, Tony realized that several of the locks were unable to be picked, leaving his crew no choice but to leave them on, cutting the chains with bolt cutters instead.

Tony considered the man's words. "Look, I don't know how to convince you that you're free," Tony admitted, turning slowly and meeting the eyes of every man, woman, and child in the room, regardless of species. They were aliens, but that didn't mean they weren't people. Pondering their slightly archaic, somewhat symbolic way of communicating, Tony quietly finished, "I have
nothing but the faith in my heart and your captor's blood on my hands. I hope you will grow to understand that we really want to help you, but I understand if, after your ordeal, you don't. We'll help you, whether or not you trust us."

Raising his hands slowly, Tony showed them the red staining them. True, it wasn't exactly the slavers' blood, but they didn't know that. Giving them all a cordial nod, Tony turned on his heel and walked to the exit, nudging Suffee along. He wanted to trust them, but he didn't think that leaving a crew member alone with the confused, angry mob would be safe. Tony was okay with risking his own life, but not the wellbeing of those under his care.

Remembering something, he stopped and turned. "Catch," he called, tossing an item from his pocket at the ringleader. The man caught it and looked questioningly at the laser in his hands. "To free yourself," Tony explained, continuing on his path to the door. He paused for a moment, listening for any sign that they might have a change of heart regarding him. All there was, was dead silence.

Disappointed, Tony left.

Suffee stopped as soon as the door slid shut behind them, FRIDAY firmly locking it. Tony wasn't sure if she should've done that, since he had claimed they were now free. It made sense though. Protection.

"Second in command?" Suffee asked with a raised eyeridge.

"I trust you, you're one of the people I know the most, the crew respects you, and you're both knowledgeable and well-read," Tony listed off as an explanation.

"Gis?"

"He's too hot-headed. He may be my unofficial ward, but he's not going to get preferential treatment from me. He's got to earn it. Also, he's a kid," he responded. Suffee nodded in satisfaction and walked off.

As he walked back to what Shoragg claimed was the captain's quarters, Gis detached himself from the wall. "Whoa," Tony said, stumbling as he noticed his unexpected shadow. He wondered if Gis had overheard the conversation. "Didn't see you there. Did you meet our guests?"

Gis grunted self-depreciatingly in a way Tony recognized. Tony himself did it often enough.

"Really? You should meet them. They aren't so bad."

A discouraged whine that dipped before rising in pitch and a pointed look in his direction.

"Alright, you might have a point. I think they're just a little standoffish because I'm the highest authority around. They're just worried that I'll go back on my word," Tony murmured, casting his eyes onto the ground. "Were you listening over the earpiece? I should talk to FRIDAY about respecting privacy."

Gis let out a string of growls and whines.

"Okay, I have no idea what that means, actually." Tony eyed the Saurin, trying to decode his body language.

Repeating the phrase slowly while tapping himself on the chest with a clawed finger, Gis looked expectantly at Tony.
"I, uh, think you'll be fine. I mean, you're just a random crew member who happens to be a kid, so..." Tony shrugged.

Shoragg was walking past with a very similar-looking Rodian that could've either been his teenage kid or maybe a younger sibling. Truthfully, Tony hadn't been in the best of moods when they were taking over the starship and, as such, didn't remember a single new name. He was too embarrassed to ask and was hoping FRIDAY would lighten up and tell him someday soon. At the moment, FRIDAY was of the mind that it was his own fault and he should deal with the consequences himself. Tony was sure she'd tell him in a few days, though. JARVIS could hold a grudge for much longer than FRIDAY, after all.

"Y' speak lizard language?" asked the other teenager on the ship, jabbing a thumb at Gis.

"Well, no," Tony admitted brusquely, wondering if calling a Trandoshan a 'lizard' would be offensive, seeing that Rodians were also rather scaly. "I haven't had the time to learn it yet. I've picked up a few words, but not enough to hold a decent conversation."

"Really? But you've known him for, like, years!" The Rodian stopped, turning to stare at Gis as he passed by.

"Hoviv!" snapped Shoragg as the younger Rodian jogged to catch up to Tony and Gis. "Manners!"

"Hoviv!" snapped Shoragg as the younger Rodian jogged to catch up to Tony and Gis. "Manners!"

Nope, that was definitely a father-son vibe he was feeling.

Now, Tony's sense of time may have been permanently skewed by roughly twenty straight years of science binges, boozes, and partying, but even he knew that this was wrong. "What? No! I knew him for weeks. A few months, at most!" He hid a guilty glance at Gis by pretending to examine the lounge they passed. Contrary to what he thought, Gis seemed unperturbed by both being called a lizard and the inadvertent implication that Tony did not care about him. Tony wasn't sure whether it was because he knew that Tony did care or because Gis didn't care.

"So how do you know what he's saying?" demanded Hoviv, no doubt trying to catch Tony in a lie. Ah, teenage rebellion, how he missed it. Harley rebelled against his mom, not the 'cool uncle' Tony perceived himself to be, and Peter's form of 'rebellion' included stuff like doing an extra hour of patrol or wearing a Doctor Strange T-shirt. JARVIS had... No, not going down that train of thought.

"Sheesh, teengage rebellion," Tony muttered. "Well, back at home, I had three robot children that communicated to me through beeps, whistles, whirrs, and what limited body language they can scrounge up. At least with Gis I can see his facial expressions. Most languages have some tonal sub-language. It doesn't usually tell much, but I'm just that good."

"You don't have robot children!" the teen said triumphantly. "Droids are fully developed when they are commissioned."

"Well, I made them myself. Programed every line of coding in their matrixes and put together their circuits with my own two hands," Tony said, wriggling his fingers. "They're my kids in every way that matters. Ask Friday to show you some clips of them later, if you don't believe me."

"You're lying," the Rodian claimed.

"Tony no lie!" Gis snarled, stepping up nose to nose with the Rodian. "Ghrakhowsk has honor! Not like you!"

"Do you even know who Friday is?" Tony asked, trying to head off the oncoming argument.

"Yeah? Well, at least my dad under-" He was cut off by two things happening at once.
The first was Tony, who hurriedly moved to hook his arm over Gis and physically remove him from the confrontation. Of course, even that had to go wrong. Due to neither of them backing down (Quite the opposite, really - they got a lot closer, nearly wrestling with each other without touching, if that was possible), Tony accidently smacked Hoviv's face in his haste as he grabbed Gis.

The second? Well...

"Enough!" Shoragg roared, grabbing Hoviv by the collar and nearly yanking the younger Rodian off his feet.

In his surprise over the usually-stoic Rodian's large lung capacity and obviously-repressed anger issues, Tony let go of Gis, who dropped onto the floor at the sudden release with a muffled "Umf!" Gis raised his head, glaring at Tony, who stepped back, hands raised. In retaliation, Gis kicked Tony's ankle out from underneath him, knocking him down too. Hands waving wildly, Tony went careening into the two Rodians, also taking them down. They landed on top of Gis, who closed his eyes and laid his head back onto the ground, defeated.

They all contemplated their situation for a moment, wondering how to salvage their pride.

"I'm all for forgetting this ever happened. What about you? Think this situation is forgettable?" Tony asked.

He was answered by a moan from Hoviv, clutching his face, a wide-eyed nod of agreement from Shoragg, and a low whine from Gis. None of them moved from their spot in the pile.

"Shoragg..." Tony drew out, wondering how to address the problem to a person of a culture almost as violent as Gis's. He figured it was best to deal with it as he dealt with Gis. As bluntly and tactlessly as possible. "A little less volume next time. And tone down on the anger, please. This is a violence-free zone."

Shoragg glanced at him but did nothing more.

"Gis," Tony continued patiently, "You may be my unofficial ward, but that doesn't make you any higher on the chain of command. This is just like back at the shipyard. Play nice."

Tony turned back to Shoragg.

"And about Hoviv..." Tony stopped as Shorrag jerked, making a defensive move over his mostly-likely-a-son. "Is he one of my crew members or just your family member-guest thing? Because if he's just a guest, I can't really order him around except to tell him to keep out of a certain room, but if he's a crew member, he gets paid, but I can order him not to mess with my kids." He turned to Hoviv. "That being said, I don't care if you're not under my command. Don't mess with my kids."

-The rich, the powerful, like Stark, they don't care about us!-

Tony was familiar with bureaucracy, but still. Paperwork... long lines... even longer wait times...

Honestly, he'd forgotten about all of those. Back where everyone knew his name, Tony didn't have to wait. Everyone, whether they loved him or hated him, rushed to fulfill the jobs they were assigned. If not his fame, then it was his money that opened all those doors. Here, he had to wait in standard lines for a standard meeting with a standard employee with a standard attitude. It was maddening.

"And this is how the other half lives," Tony said to himself with a hint of irony. This whole time, he thought he got it. Low pay, not being taken seriously, stretching pennies - well, credits - and
bartering to get food on the table... Well, all those didn't hold a candle to wait time. Tony would happily take all the other things, if he didn't have to wait. Tony was a man of action. He moved, he tinkered, he created. Time was money, after all. Sadly, he was low on both.

When Tony finally got an audience, he was in no mood to play around. Plonking his datapad onto the desk, he plopped down on the seat. "Okay," Tony said, clasping his hands in front of him and setting it on the wood, "I got almost three dozen different bounties to collect and roughly three times as many beings to turn over to your expertise. The bounties are in here and the beings are on my ship. What do I hafta do?"

The look on the poor employee's face was a balm to his frazzled soul. As were those on the manager the rookie managed to drag with him.

At first, the Guild wanted to confiscate the ship as 'evidence' or something. Well-tuned to the mechanisms of law enforcement, Tony merely presented the cargo hold full of illegally-taken people. After that, it was easy to convince the people in charge that Tony would take care of the bulk of the freed people. All they had to do was to give him the ship he would need to transport them to a planet of their choosing. True, a few of them would take their chances with the guild or on the planet, but most of them surprisingly decided to stay with Tony for now.

At the end of the day, Tony was nineteen people lighter (not including the slavers) and a hundred credits heavier. It wasn't much, but most of the cash went to the slaves or his crew. Bai-Gon had decided to leave too - apparently, he knew a gal on this planet - but everyone else had decided to stay.

Most importantly, though, Tony had papers for the ownership of the starship. In celebration, the entire crew got completely sloshed.

"A new year, a new chapter, a new life!" Greer said, raising his glass in toast. It promptly spilled over his head.

"I'm never gambling ever again!" declared Suffee, downing yet another mug of whatever they were drinking.

"No," Tony said bluntly, snatching Gis's glass from his claws with an amazing coordination that he had developed over years of drunk engineering. "Y're underage. Go drink juice 'r somethin'."

"My dad's a kriffin', backstabbin'-" Galee said something in her native language before bursting into tears.

"To backstabbers 'n morons," Tony slurred, raising Gis's shot. "F*** you, Clint, I'm calling this ship the Millennium Falcon."

"The rich, the powerful, like Stark, they don't care about us! -

Tony turned back to his datapad. "I named my first starship after Wilson," Tony muttered in disbelief, staring at the name on the interplanetary database. "Of all people, I named it after the kriffing sidekick. Why didn't you stop me, baby girl?"

"It could've been worse," Friday reassured him. "You could've named it The Captain's Triumph."

Tony gagged.

"Captain, we got a situation," Greer told him.
"Never, under any circumstance, call me Captain. Make that a rule. I'm either Tony or Stark," Tony complained. "Dr. Stark," he corrected himself, remembering Strange.

"Yeah, well, I'm sending them up to you," Greer said, brushing him off.

"Them?" Tony asked. "Hey, wait!" FRIDAY pointedly produced canned crackling sounds through the earpiece to indicate that Greer turned off his earpiece. "Friday, can you turn it back on? Fri? Little girl, baby girl? The light of my life and-

"I'm sorry, boss. I'm afraid I can't do that. That would be an invasion of privacy," FRIDAY recited gleefully. "They're here."

"Who is 'they'?" Tony demanded as the door slid open. Gis stiffened, turning towards the sound.

"Boss," Suffee said, walking in, followed by two strangers, "I'd like to introduce you two to our new coworkers and crewmates." Tony didn't see how Gis's eyes brightened, or how he crouched to the floor, muscles tensed. Tony was looking at the new arrivals. It was the very aggressive ex-slave and someone that looked like a giant, hairy, bodybuilding teddy bear.

"Um... why them?" Tony asked.

Gis lunged for the teddy bear's throat.

Chapter End Notes

Shout out to Fanfiction Guest who alerted me to a fact I got wrong. Thanks, buddy. Please make an account and sign in so you can help me out in a less one-sided way. To the rest of you: Remember, I haven't actually watched Star Wars yet. Just...please message me with basic information about the government or daily life if you can, or do what Guest did and correct my ignorance. It'd be a big help.

Like, how does bounty hunting work? Can you just barge your way through any system/planet and just nab the guy/goods, or do you need a permit/written note/the government to say yes? If a dude is wanted for a crime in one sector/space/galaxy, but you chase him across a border and into the next one, can you still arrest him, or is it now illegal? Can you turn the dude into any Bounty Hunter's Guild office, only a specific one that's supposed to be listed on the bounty? Also, if you know something about Republic influence on Hutt space, please notify me. I was somewhat under the impression that Republic was the name of the galaxy or something, and that's something I have to fix in chapter 5?

I sort of made the deleted scenes side-story I was talking about a while ago. Feel free to check it out. Or not. Your choice. I'm changing the update time one OISAMOW to every other Tuesday (this technically counts as this Tuesday's update) to make room for the electronics ban and give me moving room for when college starts.
And the Adventure Starts (It's About Time)

Chapter Summary

Bounty hunting leads Tony to some VERY interesting people. People who aren't as amused by his presence as he is by theirs.

Chapter Notes

Okay. I'm just going to assume that sectors are like states, with the Republic being the country itself. Wild Space is like the Western frontier: unclaimed states with their own people living in it. Separatists? We'll get to that when the war starts (because I'm too lazy to think about it until I /really/ have to).

Yes, I made up a fake planet with fake people. I figured that there's like, 10,000s of inhabitable planets in SW, so I can just make up one and there's a chance something similar to it exists.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The half-finished Iron Man armor on the 'Falcon was much lighter than the usual armor, both in terms of armor and firepower. Actually, it was just a pair of Iron Man gauntlets and a pair of Iron Man boots. Enough to fly with, but almost no protection at all.

The Iron Man armor was a heavy piece of technology that could weigh tons at its heaviest (VERONICA armor), but the titanium needed for his preferred titanium-gold alloy was proving much more difficult to procure. Apparently, titanium was all but unknown in this galaxy. Instead, Tony was offered metals more costly than platinum and assured that they were some of the strongest materials available. He wasn't able to get phrik, but the rest were his, with heavy bartering and promises of future business. Cortosis and Mandalorian iron. Songsteel. Ultrachrome. Beskar. Neuranium.

Tony had bought less than half an ounce each of all of the metals. He didn't need much more for testing.

Of course, the first thing he found out was that he had been cheated: Subject Two was the same thing as Subject Five. Beskar and Mandalorian iron were the same thing. Other than that, everything went well. More than well, actually. Subject One was actually a rock with special abilities. Subject Three would have made Vibranium jealous. Speaking of Vibranium...

"Boss, this is Vibranium," FRIDAY stated.

"Excuse me?" Tony asked, glancing over at Subject Four. FRIDAY ran the scanner over the rounded metal pebble again.

"I am certain. This is the exact molecular formula of Vibranium," FRIDAY answered.
"Exponential times the availability at a fraction of the cost," Tony murmured with a smirk, shaking his head in wonder. It led to questions, though. If there was more Vibranium in this universe, it would be logical to conclude that Vibranium came from this universe. If they found and replicated the path the Vibranium took to get to Earth... "And you said Subject Two was more durable?"

"Yes, along with Three."

Wakanda's going to be jealous," Tony snickered. "Okay, Fri, set aside a small portion of my funds every week. I need enough credits for ten pounds of Subject Four, one pound of Subject Three, four pounds of Subject Two, and possibly half a pound of Subject Six."

"And Subject One?"

"Both of its abilities are easily replicated. Not worth the price. Plus, it's a rock."

"Confirmed. You currently have forty-two percent of the funds needed," FRIDAY added smugly.

"Whoa, where did that come from? You didn't rob a bank, do you?" Tony questioned. He wasn't sure that FRIDAY could transfer that amount of money untracked and he was unwilling to risk his girl like that.

"Stocks," FRIDAY answered, exasperated. FRIDAY had been playing with stocks? Smart.

"Stocks, huh? That's my girl," Tony said proudly. His little girl was taking initiative.

"Thanks, dad," FRIDAY said softly. Tony froze. Sure, he regarded FRIDAY as his own child, and she called him dad whenever she was frightened for his life, but this was a completely different scenario. He wasn't in any danger... "Boss? Did I do something wrong?" FRIDAY asked quietly.

This snapped Tony out of his shock. He was overthinking this. Tony shook his head. "No! No, you didn't do anything wrong, Fri. I was..." Tony searched for the right words. "I was just surprised. Lost of things are changing. That's all. You're growing up so fast."

"If it makes you uncomfortable..." FRIDAY hedged.

"Heck, no! This is great! Unexpected, but great," Tony said, wondering what a normal father was supposed to say. "I'm just going to keep calling you Fri, if that's alright with you. 'My daughter' is way too formal, don't you think? Too much of a mouthful, if you catch my drift. I mean, if you want me to, I guess I can call you that. It'll take some getting used to, but it's doable."

"Friday's fine," FRIDAY assured him. "...Dad."

Tony smiled up at where the orb was hovering over the desk, making sure that the cameras and sensors caught every inch of it. They both turned back to the metals, the father-and-daughter pair happily 'sciencing' together.

-Doth mother know you weareth her drapes?-  

Bounty hunting was... a different experience. It was the subtlety of weeding out Obie's moles, the fire of the Avenger's clashes, the in-and-outs of Iron Man's first, self-imposed 'missions,' and the false pleasantries and double meanings of foreign dignitaries. All that was added to 'not-enough-credits' and 'Tony, the ship doesn't have enough hyperfuel for that!' Basically, it was an organized chaos that he was intimately familiar with.

After he tried to straighten out the mess with Gis and the 'Wookie,' the two of them teamed up to
take him down - or, as FRIDAY gleefully called it, 'totally owned by a lizard and a rug.' Apparently, that ground whatever beef they had with each other. They still eyed each other with suspicion and distrust, but they weren't actively trying to strangle each other, so that was a plus. Throughout the entire fiasco, the man Suffee brought along unhelpfully laughed and kept riling them up. Tony ordered him to the brig, which was completely ignored, even by Suffee.

Apparently, the man - Kristiff Lonely or something or the other - was a brilliant pilot. At first, Tony was offended that they thought he wasn't good enough to pilot his own ship, but, as FRIDAY pointed out, sometimes, the captain just commandeered the ship and ordered the crew around. At any rate, he couldn't stay there for 24/7, or whatever the phrase was, here. He had to eat and sleep, of course. At any rate, Christopher Alone was an 'ex'-smuggler ("I stopped smuggling for twenty-one days, now!" "You've been a prisoner for twenty-one days.") Five minutes behind the wheel proved that Kristian could definitely do some drastic evasion maneuvers.

Chewbacca, the Wookie, had been a spacefarer for a decade or so, now. He was sort of a jack-of-all-trades, something Tony deeply respected. He and Gis didn't get along because of some inherent racism between their species. Something about Trandoshans hunting on Chewbacca's planet. Tony couldn't understand Wookie-language, and Gis's enthusiastic miming was rather unhelpful, to say the least. Tony muted FRIDAY, not trusting FRIDAY's quick words. He knew that she was biased against Gis (sibling rivalry, anyone?) and that a biased explanation was often worse than heading into things with an open mind.

An act of good faith, Tony gave Suffee full control over their collective bounty hunting activities. In hindsight, giving the most pacifist member of the crew in control of the most violent activity might have been a mistake. The first thing Suffee did was filter out all bounties that said "Wanted: Dead or Alive," "Hit," or "Assassination." What it led to was a long list of object retrievals and rescues.

"Those are...interesting enough," Tony said cautiously, watching from over his shoulder. Most of them led to fighting, anyhow. Thieves really didn't want to give up whatever they stole. Tony pointed at one that seemed like the most action-packed. "How 'bout that one? I want to be a knight in shining armor. Feel like rescuing a princess from a gang of thieves?"

Suffee barely spared a glance before deleting it.

"Hey!" Tony protested. "I wanted to kiss the princess!" Tony had kissed more than his fair share of princesses. They were actually surprisingly bad kissers, actually. Tony wouldn't mind kissing the princess, though. Did this universe's princesses also tend to give their rescuers a kiss in thanks?

"She's kidnapped by the Hutts for her father cheating them out of several thousand credits. They aren't going to let her go, and we aren't going to get into it."

"They used it to get rid of poverty on their half of a moon! They shouldn't get punished for doing a good deed," Tony said. "Seriously, are the Hutts that bad?" Honestly, the most contact he had with a Hutt was when one pushed him off a ramp to make way. Rude, yes, but murderous?

Suffee gave him an incredulous look. "They are the greatest crime lords of the galaxy. Do not interfere."

"Mafia, got it," Tony muttered. He felt sorry for the kidnapped girl, but he wasn't influential enough to affect things even at a local level, yet, and the Iron Man armor couldn't go through space or travel at lightspeed. The Hutts didn't seem up to Hydra standards, more like the Ten Rings. Still, it was something Tony had to look into. He needed to make sure they weren't some sort of Robin Hood organization, then see what he could do to start chipping away at their power base. "Where
It turned out that Suffee wanted to retrieve a rare book that his family once guarded, many centuries ago. It had left Rodia - homeland of the Rodians - and somehow made its way to the Outer Core with some Rodian smuggler, transferred hands well over dozen times, then got on some Outer Rim planet for several decades. Now, the Rodian that collected it had posted on the Guild’s Bounty Board as stolen.

Under Suffee's watchful eyes, crates of some sort of cherry-like fruit were loaded into the 'Falcon, packed into the cargo hold with the twenty-or-so humanoids who were waiting for the ship to edge closer to the Core Worlds to depart. The Rodian had stated that it was a common delicacy that many of his species consumed and would be a useful side-income. Tony had tried one, only to spit it out. If the Rodians wanted it, they could have all of it.

Of course, what Tony thought to be the most boring mission ever led to the most interesting encounter Tony had yet.

The Outer Rim planet turned out to be a rather swampy rainforest, mostly inhabited by Rodians, humans, and a blueish race of humans called the Chiss. There used to be a lot more humans, but rising contention between the Chiss and the Rodians led to almost all the humans departing towards neighboring suns.

At first, it was just a normal 'rich-guy's favorite so-and-so went missing' gig. Personally, Tony thought that Tysooso just misplaced the book and forgot. The gigantic mansion the old Rodian owned was certainly crowded enough for entire speeders to get buried in. There were 'priceless' artifacts in stacked glass boxes, enough gems to give Wanda a headache, and more weapons scattered carelessly on the walls and in crates than Thor, Rogers, and Barton could've worn out in a human lifetime.

Of course, since Miss Universe (or perhaps Lady Fate) wasn't too pleased with him, the simple hide-and-seek turned out to be much more complicated. The planet, Sanshri happened to be embroiled in a Cold War that anyone who didn't visit the planet was completely unaware of. In Earth terms, there was at least a bomb scare every other week.

After Afghanistan, Tony was understandably worried about taking civilians into such a tension-filled area, but the crew had assured him that, living in Nar Shaddaa (or, in Chewbacca and Christin's case, as slaves) had made them completely capable of holding their own. They were all willing to brave the planet, more so than he was. Tony was far from reassured, but it wasn't his choice to make. Democracy and all that.

In any case, Suffee wasn't going to budge on the thought of that lost artifact. 'It's a priceless piece of history!' Yeah, right. Tony was of the opinion that 'important' data like that should be scanned and mass-transmitted to a bunch of datapads all around the galaxy to prevent it from being lost. If it wasn't important enough to make multiple copies of, then the info on it wasn't that important. But, hey! That's just Tony and his paranoia.

So in any case, he and his crew were finished sorting through the junk within two days. Tony's modified scanners that he rigged up from extra starship parts helped out a lot. It scanned for anything made out of gold. If a starship's powerful sensors couldn't find a gold-embellished book, then it wasn't in the house.

Greer and some of the other crew members were hesitant to listen to his inventions, but Tony was
sure they'd come to trust his technology in time. At any rate, the Chiss hair Suffee was OCD enough to pick out was able to be identified through FRIDAY's DNA scan.

-Doth mother know you weareth her drapes?- FRIDAY identified the Chiss who stole the book. Suffee wasted no time 'convincing' the poor Chiss to reveal who hired him. Tony wasn't sure how, but it involved a handful of the bitter cherries in the cargo hold and about five bottles of hot sauce.

So now, there they were, neck deep in Chiss-Land in the middle of a 'formal festival.' Galee was in a pretty, floaty dress, while Greer, the Kristy dude, and Tony were in monkey suits with the standard green color of the Rodian-supporting humans. Suffee refused to go, even at the chance of finding a lost book. Apparently, it wasn't that he was afraid of being lynched. No, the Rodians on board hated the thought of dressing up. Understandable, but annoying.

It was a perfect set-up, with Greer 'harassing' Galee in full sight of Tysooso's rivals. Predictably, one of the Chiss gentlemen decided to 'rescue' a suitably tearful Galee, who sprouted pitable tales of how the big, mean Rodians took advantage of her destitute situation, and her family's homelessness. The Chiss ate it up. The Chiss who rescued her wasn't the Chiss they were aiming for, but the man's nephew.

Eh, close enough.

Tony was very proud of his crew's acting. Kristal was there was a potential distraction and Tony was there to act as back-up if things went wrong, but it was clear that Galee and Greer didn't need help. Galee wormed her way into the man's good graces and would be having lunch with him the following day. Tony was all for just outright asking the guy about rare texts, but Galee had convinced him that it was a better idea to slow it down a bit.

Still, Tony worried.

-Doth mother know you weareth her drapes?- The Iron Man armor wouldn't be fully functional until he got all the metals he needed, but Tony wasn't the one that needed protection. He'd actually been working on a couple of things for his crew. As such... Tony handed a thick, metal belt to Galee, who looked at it in despair.

"Oh, lighten up! It's just a projectable shield, a camera, and a panic button," Tony said crossly. "It's not a collar or manacle. It takes forever to modify standard shielding to generate that small!"

"It goes horribly with this skirt!" Galee protested. "You couldn't have painted it gold, or even silver? Plain metallic grey isn't a flattering color!"

"Hold on, you don't care about the fact that it's heavy or that it can repel a bunch of far-ranged blaster bolts or books that are thrown at you, you just don't like the color?" Tony asked. This was... admittedly never an issue. Romanoff just spray-painted everything black, while Wanda didn't use anything tech-related in battle, other than throwing them at people. The guys didn't care about how an object looked, just that it fit comfortably in their hands and that it worked. "Friday thought it was fine." FRIDAY had added some curves and grooves into the metal, both for an easy grasp and for aesthetic reasons.

"Why would someone throw a book at Galee?" Suffee asked crossly. "You aren't, by any chance, referring to the Book of Elders?" He was promptly ignored.

"Friday's a..." Galee hesitated. "A little unexperienced in areas of human fashion."
Tony knew what Galee was going to say. *FRIDAY's a droid.* He exhaled heavily. He and FRIDAY had their work cut out for them, getting rid of all preconceptions like that. "Just... borrow some silver heels from Pep-" He stopped, mouth moving uselessly. Pepper and her array of fashionable shoes weren't here. Why did he think- It's been a while since he had a relapse. It was an unpleasant jolt that made him feel small and insignificant in the face of universe. "Just... put on a black dress or something. Black goes with everything."

Galee blinked at him slowly. "Is everything alright, sir?" she asked him timidly.

"Just memories of someone I used to love," Tony said bitterly.

"I reminded you of her?" Galee shifted back on her heels a little.

"Nah, she just had every type of footwear imaginable. She has heels that can go with anything. Giant, bulky, metal corsets included." He sent a wry look at the belt hanging loosely from Galee's hand.

Galee pursed her lips. "Black would send the wrong impression. White isn't much better. I think a nice, shiny blue would do. That, or a pattern..." She gave a curt nod and walked off.

"Women," Tony muttered, head spinning from the sudden change in topic. "Did I say something?" he asked FRIDAY.

"Men," FRIDAY retorted.

-Doth mother know you weareth her drapes?-

It went well until it didn't. Galee's surveillance was able to confirm that Cur'reth'urerron-call-me-Hue's uncle had the book stolen. Tony and Kristoff, having drawn the short straws, were volunteered into retrieving the object. Tony had spent most of their savings on the metals, so they were rather low on weapons. Greer, Shoragg, and a couple others reluctantly handed over their blasters, while someone else offered a durasteel blade that was declined. Clothes the color of the planet's brown flora were borrowed and tools were scrounged up.

Just as Tony and the 'ex'-smuggler were breaking into the mansion, everything went to hell. A nearby explosion caused Krystil to drop his lock-pick with a curse. Why they were still using locks, Tony didn't know, but he knew they couldn't stand in the open. By mutual agreement, the two humans ducked and rolled as speeders burst out of the tree line and zoomed around small obstacles. Humans he didn't know charged out of the main building to smaller ones surrounding it get a better vantage point. Tony was separated from Kristen as other aliens attacked.

No, not aliens... They were humans, or at least of a species that diverged from humans.

"Friday, who are they?" Tony asked. "Guys, anyone know these people?"

"Scanning," FRIDAY said, sounding strained.

"I don't think they're from the city..." Galee reported, uncertain. "Please, make sure Hue is okay! Miss Friday, would you please move the camera higher? I can't find him!"

"We're under attack, and all you can think about is that blue guy?" Kristoff yelled, both through the earpiece and close by. Tony looked behind himself, spotting Kristoff behind some purple bushes. He raised a hand to alert Kristoff, only to yank it back as a dead attacker fell down next to him.
"We're not under attack, they are!" protested Tony. After all, the Chiss stronghold and the guards who manned it were the ones being shot at, not Kristoff and Tony. As far as Tony knew, none of them knew the two bounty hunters were supposed to be there.

"None of the attackers are notorious enough to be reported," FRIDAY fretted.

Tony spotted dark grey lettering on the man's brown uniform. "KSC! Does anyone know what KSC stands for?"

"It's the kriffing Karazak Slavers Cooperative!" Kristoff bellowed, launching himself out of the bush, uprooting it as he slammed into the closest man in brown. "Frizzled slavers!"

'Frizzled?' Tony mouthed in confusion as he stepped out of his hiding place to aid his team member with several repulsor blasts.

"Common smuggler's swear," FRIDAY told him shortly, having seen him from wherever she sent her camera-orb.

"Guess he was telling the truth when he said he was a smuggler," Tony said disappointedly. The palm of his new gauntlet was heating up uncomfortably. Apparently, he used the wrong alloy. Inching closer to his enraged ally, Tony snagged the firearm from Kristoff's belt. He switched to using Greer's blaster, seeing that Kristoff wasn't using it.

"Ex! Ex-smuggler! I'm a skrogging bounty hunter now!" The self-proclaimed skrogging bounty hunter was choking another human with the fork of the bush, having knocked out the first one.

Just when Tony thought things couldn't get any crazier, a man in wizard-y robes jumped out of a kriffing tree and started decapitating the aliens with a glowing sword.

"Color me impressed," Tony said, staring at the very shiny piece of technology. It sliced neatly through a vehicle that was a cross between a buggy and a really fat speeder bike. "Color me very impressed." A dead person, cut into two nearly symmetrical pieces, landed on the ground several meters away from him. "Um... actually, I take that back."

"Color, got it, boss. What color hair dye do you wish for me order?" FRIDAY asked through the earpiece with false seriousness.

Tony groaned at the weak attempt at humor. "That was awful."

"He was joking," Kristoff's voice snapped.

"So was she," Tony said dryly. "Actually, mine wasn't a joke. It was an expression. What's up with the maniac with a glow-in-the-dark sword?" Really, maniac was really the only way to describe him. He was a slash-happy moron that ran headfirst into danger. Even more surprisingly, he didn't get hit. The aliens must have Chitari-level aiming skills, or he just had really good reflexes, not that Tony was jealous. That had to be the only explanation. That, and luck.

"What? You don't know about the Jedi?"

"Fri?"

"The Jedi are a group of government-funded peacekeeping force, more or less allowed on any planet. They are rumored to have abilities unlike any other."

Tony took a moment to think that over. Overpowered people who thought they had the right to butt
in anywhere, government and civilians' opinions and desires be d***ed. There was only one conclusion to be reached... "Great. More Avengers," Tony groaned. "Can't I catch a break?"

"No," deadpanned FRIDAY.

"Be nice," Suffee scolded from the 'Falcon.'

"It's nice that you acknowledged me as a sentient, learning being," FRIDAY said snidely. "Boss!" she warned as the Jedi moved too close to her father for comfort.

"I see him," Tony said, ducking a blaster bolt and firing his own. The Jedi was getting close to where two slavers hid behind three fallen speeders. "Gandalf, behind you!"

"It is highly unlikely he understands that reference," Friday informed him. "Less than a hundredth of a percent, actually. Even less than the chances of."

"Cut out the chatter!" Kristoff grunted as he punched someone else.

Extermis gave him a split-second's warning to dodge, arm raised to deflect. Searing heat whited out his vision for a moment. "Hey, I'm with you on the beat-up-guys-in-brown!" Tony protested, eyes focusing on the attacker - the Jedi. He looked down to check his arm. "Um... That wasn't what I meant!" he blurted, realizing that he was clad in brown.

Without even an apology, the Jedi turned away.

"He just broke your hand-gun thing!" Galee said, horrified. Tony scowled at the two-inch slash on the forearm of the gauntlet.

"No, he just disabled some of the circuitry. It can still fire." He shot at a pair of slavers that peeked over a crumbled wall. Tony raised his voice. "It was very expensive, though, so I expect you to pay for it, Robes! I can take your light-sword instead, though!" he shouted after the Jedi. The sword was admittedly good technology. Tony wanted to get his hands on it. It went right through the aliens like butter. Horrifying and gruesome, but something he had to have, if only to defend himself and his people.

"Son of a blaster," insulted Kristoff as Tony knocked out the last slaver still standing. He kicked at a (hopefully) unconscious body. "You realize they're basically broke, right? No accepting money, no material possesions. Heck, no emotions! They're practically droids."

Tony straightened and surveyed the destruction. His time on the Avengers team had made him more or less an expert on architecture. The buildings had suffered cosmetic damage, but the structure was still firm. None of them were in any danger of falling. In silent agreement, Kristoff had his six o'clock as they made their way to a large, gaping hole on the main building. They two of them strode purposely through it and down the hall. Assuming that they were meant to be there, the building's guards ran right past them, busy securing the premises. FRIDAY directed her orb ahead, already scanning for gold.

"The Jedi is in the next hall over, talking to the thief and his nephew," FRIDAY said. Tony and Kristoff froze, immediately backtracking. It was all for naught. The Jedi rounded the corner, not seeming at all surprised to see them there.

Seeing that they were caught, Tony held out his hand. "Hello, sir Jedi. May I say it was an honor fighting with you? Those sword moves you used were kriffering awesome!" Tony told him enthusiastically. He had to cut himself off, remembering Underoos fondly. Even so, he couldn't
help giving a longing glance at the light-sword.

"Bounty hunter," the 'Jedi' greeted with contempt, inclining his head a fraction, but not reaching for the hand. "I wasn't expecting one of your kind here."

"Um.. okay? I thought they were supposed to be the good guys," Galee huffed.

Tony withdrew his outstretched hand, a hard glint appearing in his eyes. If the Jedi wanted to pay this game, Tony would happily oblige. He was a fluent speaker of 'arrogant, entitled a**hole.' "Oh, yeah, we kind of know everyone, get into everything. Part of our charm, you see. So... doth your mother know you weareth her drapes?"

Kristoff snorted. 'Hue' had a coughing fit that sounded suspiciously like laughter.

Chapter End Notes

To my experience, EVERYTHING requires paperwork. Even joining a /club/ requires paperwork, so I'll make Tony do paperwork to collect a several thousand credits from a mercenary organization. I don't care if that's not how it works in SW. Just say it's the author's frustration at bureaucracy showing through. I'll have to edit the previous two chapters to make way for new information about how the galaxy works, but I'm a procrastinator and it'll probably happen sometime within the next two years or something.

Yes, the new dude's name keeps changing. Tony's not to keen on him at the moment, and the writing reflects that. The metals referenced are all real SW metals. I just picked a random one and said it was Vibranium. Yes, I know Vibranium is probably weaker than ultrachrome. And, yes my TeamIronMan! is showing a bit in this chapter.

Over 25,000 words, and the Jedi have just appeared. Is this taking too long? Should I put more dialogue instead of background? Still new at this; help me out.

Completely unrelated, but Guardians of the Galaxy 2? Someone told me that Mantis is the last of her species, but I can't find that info. Is that 'canon' or 'fanon'?"
Chapter Summary

Jedi experiments inconclusive. No matter. Tony really didn't want to touch that with a ten-inch pole. Studying the guy's power was enough for him.

Chapter Notes

I... have no excuse this time. Sorry. I know it's late. I mean, I'd say "I had an exam," but honestly... the exam was today, not Tuesday. I know, I know; I'm a failure. You don't have to remind me.

On the bright side, I have made a 'timeline.' Sort of. Eh. Dark side... it puts the story at 40 chapters? It'll probably change (and mutate and swell and shrivel up...) if I let it stew, though. Hopefully, I can condense it some. I don't want to be working on this for >2 years! On the even brighter side, you have just over a week until the next update. That is, unless I disappoint you guys again.

I'd just get rid of the 'every other Tuesday' deadline, since it doesn't seem to work that well, but I know myself; if there's no deadline, you'd get updates about, like, once every month or two.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony peered around the corner. No one there. Without turning his head, he flicked his eyes to the left hall of the T-section. Nope. No one there either. It made no sense! Both the halls were dead ends and the rooms were locked. He'd know. Tony tried to open them just yesterday.

Letting out an Italian curse, Tony hissed, "I thought you said he went down this hall!"

"Did! Saw Ala Ja go in!" protested Gis. Tony flinched at his voice. The Saurin didn't seem to get the idea that the earpieces were powerful - it sounded like Gis was shouting in his ear.

"Bet you weren't paying attention," a young voice taunted. Tony frowned. Gis was teenager, but his skin was pretty much armor. Why was there another kid out here, one that was most likely unarmed? None of his other crew members was this young, right? He'd know-

"Hold on... Hoviv? Who let this kid...?" Tony asked.

"He isn't in any danger. Jedi are peacekeepers," Shoragg answered.

"Gis didn't see, Hoviv didn't see!" Gis accused.

"Gis is correct. You were assigned to do the same task," FRIDAY said with a hint of smugness.

"Kids, no fighting. Just... find me that Jedi," Tony said, running a hand through his hair.

"I have spotted him. He is currently crossing the courtyard," FRIDAY revealed. Tony immediately
started jogging towards the general area.

"Head back to the ship," he urged the two kids as he passed by them. The two teens scowled rebelliously as he went around the corner, but FRIDAY confirmed that they were going back. A few of the servants and Chiss gave him odd looks. Tony knew that sneaking around would seem more suspicious if he was caught, so Tony merely grinned and gave them a nod. Assuming that he was meant to be there, they left him alone.

"Hold on, did Friday just hack into the security system? That's illegal, isn't it?" asked Galee as Tony rounded a corner and spotted the Jedi. "You're not allowed to do that." Tony ducked behind a pillar, snagging a pebble. He weighed it in his hand, surprised at its lightness. Even through at full force, it probably wouldn't make a bruise. Peering at the Jedi, he chucked it at him and hid again.

"Technically, you being here is illegal," Charell pointed out. "I mean, we never got permission to even be on this planet."

Through the reflection on a slightly cracked window, Tony was amazed to find the Jedi sidestepping the makeshift projectile, allowing it to skim harmlessly across his chest. The guy turned in the direction the rock came from... Tony's direction.

Dang, I should've ducked behind the tree! Tony thought angrily. Thinking quickly, he bent down, snagged a twig, and threw it at the tree. The leaves rustled quietly. Tony counted three seconds before the Jedi turned to the plant. Keeping an eye on the man's reflection, Tony doubled up and ran - er, made a 'tactful retreat.'

-I don't like people handing me things-

"Okay, the most I've got is supersensory, maybe some precognitive abilities," Tony told an unconvinced Gis from the seventh - better not tempt fate, you see - story of the complex. "Watch."

Tony fixed a mirror that showed the reflection of another mirror, showing the Jedi on the ground, directly under the window he had led Gis to. He was talking to a security guard 'thoughtfully.' Tony wasn't sure how he managed it. All he did was frown and nod. Apparently, that's all you needed to do to seem thoughtful. Then, Tony grabbed a bucket of soapy water and began pouring it. To tell you the truth, water seemed anticlimactic.

What the heck, Tony thought with an inward shrug, just dropping the entire bucket and its remaining water down too. Gis stared at Tony, stunned, before moving to look out of the window.

"No!" Tony yelped, reaching out to snag Gis's arm. He dragged the Saurin away. "Are you crazy? No, don't answer that. I know you're a maniac. If you look down, they'll see you. Just use the krippin' mirrors I spent twenty minutes on."

Gis looked at the mirror, then at Tony, who peered up at it himself.

"Son of a blaster," Tony cursed, realizing that all the action had already happened and they had completely missed it.

"Ghrakhowsk missed," Gis pointed out.

"No, I didn't miss, thank you very much! I know my trajectories and angles! I got a Master's Degree on that sort of thing! That-that Jedi moved out of the way! He heard it coming or something and moved out of the way!" Tony ranted.

Gis gave a deadpan look and moved towards the door.
Frowning, Tony had FRIDAY rewind and replay the security footage she nicked from the building. As it played again, Tony had a cold feeling overcome him, making the hairs on his arms stand up. Slowly, he turned and looked out of the room and down the hall to where Gis and Hoviv were arguing about something-or the-other.

He turned and looked back at the video.

"Hey Fri, is it just me, or do you see the Jedi walk right past the kids too?" Tony asked uncertainly.

"Boss, I'd like to confirm that Gis and Hoviv allowed the Jedi Master to pass," FRIDAY's voice came over the speakers, her intonation reflecting his uncertainty. "Permission to hack all camera feeds the Jedi enters?" she suggested

"Permission granted," Tony agreed. A single screen appeared in front of him, then it was covered by another. The display flickered for a moment, then disappeared. "Friday?" Tony asked, alert. His fingers twitched as he resisted reaching for the control panel. His girl had everything under control.

"Just a moment, dad. Just recoding and refiguring some things." The displays came on, but this time there were multiple feeds playing at once. "The old one only showed one at a time," she said in explanation.

Tony nodded approvingly. "Good job. The one in the center's real-time, right?"

The two of them grew silent as they reviewed everything. This time, instead of looking for obvious displays of power and red mist, Tony fixed his eyes on the people on-screen. Unlike how everyone noticed how he stood out, not a single one of them batted an eye at the Jedi. He squeezed between two Chiss in a conversation, and neither of them missed a beat. It didn't make sense. The Jedi was in krippin' Harry Potter robes!

"Order everyone to stay away from the Jedi, Fri. I want to make sure it doesn't have lasting effects. Keep an eye on the lil' maniac and the anti-maniac, let me know if they start acting oddly. If the Jedi comes within twenty meters of anyone in our crew, tell them to get out of there. Immediately."

-I don't like people handing me things-

"Boss, I lured them under the main scanners under false pretenses. Their brain waves match up to the data I collected last week. There's nothing wrong with either them."

"Nothing wrong, or nothing you can spot? Seriously, how do we figure out if there's mind control?"

"I... I'm sorry boss. I don't- There's not enough data to form conclusions at this point."

"Okay. Keep an eye on them, Fri."

"You can count on me."

-I don't like people handing me things-

Honesty, the Jedi dude was a huge letdown. He wouldn't let Tony touch his 'lightsaber,' wouldn't use the Force, and wouldn't show Tony any of his cool Jedi moves. Tony spent the next three hours asking for scans, both from the Jedi and the people he encountered. He was refused each and
every time, with the same, placid expression from the Jedi. The Chiss just looked at him like he was crazy. Tony offered to find out what made Jedi different from the rest of the population, which was met with open hostility. The Jedi somehow noticed FRIDAY's orb trying to scan him on Tony's orders, twisted out of the way, and hurried away.

Everything else was going well. Galee sweet-talked her Chiss gentleman into returning the book and the Rodian collector decided not to press charges. With the human slavers and their minions caught or disposed of, much of the tension between the two dominant species on the planet seemed to be dissolving. Chiss and Rodian children could be seen playing together. The adults, though cautious, occasionally mingled with each other. The chasm between them was large, but it was slowly healing. The Jedi had done his best. Only time could do the rest.

"Hey, Suff," Tony said causally, leaning against the console. "Where can you find the Jedi? Like, headquarters, hometown... that sort of place?"

Suffee looked suspiciously at him. "Why do you want to know?"

"I figured that if there's more Jedi, the chances of one of them letting me scan them is higher than in a lower population," Tony said with a shrug.

"No," Suffee said, rolling his eyes. When Tony made to argue, Suffee calmly pointed out, "You said this was a democracy. We want to keep bounty hunting and helping people. All of us. No one wants to go to Coruscant. I'm pretty sure Kristoff has a restraining order on him there. The only way you can go to Coruscant is if you, as captain, seize total control of the ship. Are you willing to do that?"

Tony hastily shook his head. No, Tony would never take complete command over his team. Not like Rogers did, where there was no chance of arguing. "No! I'd never-"

"Good." Suffee turned from him. "Concentrate on matters that affect this ship and the people. If none of us has shown Force sensitivity by now, we cannot weld it and it matters not. Magic is wild. Focus on science," he dismissed.

But wasn't magic just a higher science? The rules of this universe seemed different than Tony's original world. "Okay. What's next?" Tony agreed quietly. Suffee showed him a hit on some smugglers that recently hijacked a ship and kidnapped the crew. This was interesting. And dangerous... "How'd you like your very own armor to inhabit, Fri?" he asked aloud, knowing FRIDAY was listening in.

"I admit that that would be a relief," FRIDAY told him.

"Put the rest of my armor on hold. We're saving up to get you a complete suit!"

"But what about-"

"Don't worry, Fri. Extermis, remember? I'll be fine and you'll be up and ready to protect me."

"Okay, dad," FRIDAY agreed. "I want pink. Hot pink and gold."

"Flashy and stylish. You take after your father," Tony said fondly. FRIDAY beeped in response, letting Tony know that she was slightly occupied helping one of the other crewmembers. Tony wandered out of the ship and perched on one of the last crates of 'cherries' they had left.

"Oi, off!" a voice complained loudly. Tony shriveled around, seeing a surprisingly buff Rodian loom threateningly over him.
"Oops, sorry!" Tony said, raising his hands in apology. "Carry on." He got off and waved at the crates.

The Rodian growled and lifted the crate onto a luggage cart of some sort. He sneered at Tony and muttered loudly to himself, "Le nochka tuo halackne ladda buchat!"

"Friday, what did he say?" Tony asked with a frown.

"Boss, you don't want to know," FRIDAY told him, turning her attention back.

Tony drew himself up and put his hands on his hips in a 'heroic' pose. "No, really, I want to know. I'm channeling Captain America, here. Hate on bullies and all that. Come on, tell me!"

"He insulted your manners and your looks," FRIDAY admitted.

"Great, now give me a Rodian insult, one that Shoragg would smack me for using anywhere near his kid." He checked to make sure neither Shoragg nor Hoviv were anywhere close. Or any other Rodian, for that matter.

"Boss, I don't think this is a good idea," FRIDAY warned.

"Insulting me isn't a good idea."

"Dad-" FRIDAY pleaded.

"Friday, do as I say."

"Golo nochta mootee, ne linga sochack," FRIDAY said.

Tony repeated it to the Rodian, who snarled at him but was unable to swing a punch, due being busy carrying the crates. "Thanks Fri," Tony said, feeling better now that his daily dose of mean moves was out of the way. FRIDAY didn't respond. "Come on, Fri, don't be like that!"

"I should have expected such crassness from a bounty hunter," Tony heard. He turned to see the Jedi master.

"Sifo-Dyas!" Tony exclaimed. "I didn't expect to see you here."

The Jedi examined Tony closely. Tony didn't like the feeling. It was as if Wanda was in his head again. True, he couldn't really sense that she was in his head, but the idea was just as bad. His crew did say that Jedi had mystic powers or something, and he did see the Jedi use some power over perception. "You are different," the Jedi said.

"Everyone's unique, as paradoxical as it sounds," Tony said, unimpressed at the vague words. He resisted the urge to tap the center of his chest to check that his arc reactor was still there. It didn't help against such delicate mind manipulations, after all. The only thing it defended his mind from was Loki's blatant mind control. It did nothing against Wanda.

"You are blunt and insult with an ease like breathing, yet you do not truly mean it...often," Sifo-Dyas muttered. He narrowed his eyes and reached for Tony. "Are you Force-sensitive?"

Quickly, Tony snatched his wrist out of the way, glaring back at the Jedi. He took a step back to show that he didn't appreciate being touched without his consent. "How would I know?" asked Tony. Looking at the Jedi, he could see that the man didn't quite understand that Tony was slowly getting p***ed.
"I see," the Jedi murmured. "You are Anthony Stark technically of Nar Shaddaa due to some experienced hacking, registered under the Bounty Hunting Guild with the Millenial Falcon under your name. Expect a meeting with me at a future point in time."

Tony straightened up at the clear power play. The Jedi had searched him up on the 'holonet' or whatever it was called. Even more worryingly, he somehow knew that FRIDAY had hacked records! The watch on Tony's right had snapped into place as a thin repulsor glove, humming with power. Tony pointed it threateningly at the Jedi who posed a harm to FRIDAY. The Jedi took no notice, not even looking up as he pivoted. Instead of tensing up like most people would have done if they knew a weapon was pointed at them, Sifo-Dyas left with a casual stride.

"Crew, I think we got a Jedi after us," Tony said into his earpiece. "It wasn't my fault, I swear it!"

- I don’t like people handing me things -

The Jedi left immediately after that odd encounter. The 'Falcon left just hours later with a few, large containers of some sort of tea and scented woods.

FRIDAY's armor, the Iron Maiden, was a slow project. While she was decent at it, most of the initial credits FRIDAY made through stocks was just blind luck. After that, while the flow was steady, it was slow and not a viable source of income for anything other than fuel and food. Even funds for those ran low at times, depending on the jobs they took. The 'Falcon crew were careful to make sure that their jobs either helped those that would otherwise be ignored, to keep out of the way of more experienced bounty hunters. This took down most of the high-paying jobs that were available.

Tony was glad to help people, he really was, but having low funds was maddening. There were so many things he could do but not enough time or credits to do them, but he would make it happen. His father made a multi-million dollar company out of the slums of New York. Tony could make a multi-million credit company out of the shadows of Nar Shaddaa.

Some smugglers-turned-slavers that they ran into on the way to some desert planet - Tattoos or something - to drop of the remaining freed slaves were taken down without a problem, even with Tony's unfinished Iron Man armor and FRIDAY's suit still offline. Tony's crew was like a well-oiled machine. They'd been working together for years in broken-down spaceships, where you had to depend on others to warn you if a metal sheet came loose and was about to crash down into you. Even with the addition of 'outsiders' like Tony, Chewbacca, and Kristoff, they knew how to work together. Working together in a repair crew was apparently more useful than the trust-fall exercises that Rogers had them do in training. Figures.

The bounty hunting guild let them have those smugglers' ship, but Tony and the crew decided to give it to the remaining three people in the cargo hold. He really wanted to help them, but they were honestly a drain on resources. They didn't trust him, but Tony still wished them the best. He actually had no idea what they were planning to do. The murderous spark in their eyes suggested that wanted to take revenge on those that tried to enslave them, but Tony hoped he was wrong. He couldn't ask them - they wouldn't trust him with a real answer anyway.

The fate of those seven aside, Tony had lots of work repairing the ship. Key word: had. Tony must've not given himself enough credit, because he was finished even before they decided where to go. This left him in 'command deck,' eyeing Galee's backside. She was on the console again, tapping out a message. "Galee has friends? No one told me Galee had friends," Tony joked as he waited for Suffee.

"Takes one to know one," Galee shot back with a smirk.
"I'm wounded!" Tony cried out, sliding to the ground. "Only a kiss from a fair maiden would save me now!"

"And you think I'm a maiden because...?" Galee teased, giggling as Tony spluttered. She finished typing her message and sent it. "Yes, I'm a maiden," she told Tony, pecking him on the cheek. He tried not to ogle her backside as she flounced off. Though his past secretaries would beg to differ, Tony tried not to sleep with people he respected, especially if they were going to hold that position for a long time. Galee wasn't going anywhere, and Tony wasn't going to spoil his friendship with their best infiltrator. It reminded him of something...

Romanoff. She was a spy, infiltrating Stark Industries. Tony tried to keep his mind off the Russian assassin. It wasn't fair to compare the two. Though she definitely not anywhere close to the Black Widow's league, Galee was loyal and that was more to Tony than all the skill on the planet.

Tony tore his eyes from the closed door, starting when he realized someone was in front of him. He was so distracted, he hadn't heard Suffee walk in.

"-ut it all in here," Suffee finished tiredly, giving a wan smile to Tony.

"Thanks," Tony said, frantically trying to think of what he could have been talking about. His eyes fell on Suffee's drawn snout. Tony eyed the smile, noticing how fatigued the Rodian seemed. It seemed that being co-captain wasn't a good fit for the Rodian. It was a shame - Tony really thought Suffee could've been the Rhodey to his ship.

As he was about to speak, asking him about it, FRIDAY's voice came on over the PA system. "Space turbulence," she said flatly. Right on cue, the ship gave a noticeable wobble. Used to being inside roughly shaken transports, Tony had no problem staying up. He belatedly looked over to Suffee, wondering if the alien needed help staying up. He was right on time to see Suffee go down flailing. Tony winced at the fall, but the turbulence was already over.

"You have to sleep more. Seven hours a day, Suff," Tony scolded, reaching his hand out to help Suffee up to his feet.

Belatedly, Tony remembered how much the Rodian hated hypocrites as the upturned lips on Suffee's snout pulled down in a scowl. "As if I can't hear you pacing back and forth every night! I know you don't sleep. You're always in that workshop," Suffee spat out in fury. He would have gone on, but Tony cut him off.

"Whoa, stalkerish much?" He raised his hands as Suffee did his best to loom. "Okay, okay! I get it. I'm sorry."

Suffee huffed, holding out the datapad. "Just get it." Tony stared at the data pad. It was so close, but he couldn't- "Is something wrong?" Suffee asked with a frown.

Realizing he had took a moment too long to reach his hand out, Tony deflected, "No, no! Everything's alright." He fumbled, trying to grab at the data pad, cringing all the while, but Suffee twisted it out of reach.

"Friday, what's wrong?" Suffee asked, this time to his AI daughter.

"No! Friday, don't-"

"Boss doesn't like having things handed to him," FRIDAY said quickly, before he could order her to silence. Sneaky girl.
"Psychological or physical trauma? Have you seen a therapist or received counseling? If I trigger it, how do I-" Suffee trailed off as neither of them answered. FRIDAY's camera was trained on Tony, who stared unflinchingly back.

"Dad," FRIDAY said simply. Tony looked away.

"Why didn't you say so?" Suffee asked instead, turning and setting the data pad onto the console next to him. "Go on," the Rodian said with a raised eyebrow, waving his hand expectantly at it. Suffee glanced at the console, then leaned heavily on it.

"I didn't want to cause you trouble," Tony offered weakly, surprised that Suffee didn't just wrest his hand out and force the object into it. Maybe his fellow captain was simply to tired to.

Suffee looked up for a long moment at the ceiling. Tony resisted the urge to tell him that FRIDAY was, in fact, not located in the ceiling. "It's no trouble," Suffee said patiently. "Actually, it's probably less trouble. Now, I can just call you over and make you get the stuff instead of walking across the entire ship to find you!"

Tony looked at Suffee the way he examined politicians and snakes. He couldn't tell if he was lying or not. Reaching out, he picked up the datapad. He glanced up at Suffee. No outward reaction.

"Okay..." Tony said hesitantly, stepping back. "Thanks," he blurted, making a tactful retreat from the room. Behind him, he heard Suffee ask FRIDAY a question. Tony touched his earpiece cautiously, wondering if he had to classify some more data before FRIDAY revealed it. "Get more sleep!" he yelled just before the doors closed. What? Tony liked having the last word.

Tony quickly ran down the hall to the recreational room instead of the workshop. It was best he didn't go where Suffee expected him. Suffee was tired, but who knows? The Rodian could certainly hold a grudge long enough to track him down for that last bit.

"Dad?" FRIDAY hedged. "Suffee wants to know if we can go bounty hunting, or if you want to transport cargo."

"That's it?" Tony asked, surprised. "No digging after my deepest, darkest secrets?"

"No. Dad... I think they're good people," FRIDAY told him, sounding uncertain.

"Even Gis?"

"I have calculated a less than 27% chance of an additional betrayal," FRIDAY reluctantly admitted. "Personality algorithms based on prior experiences suggest that loyalty, once earned, is a key trait and highly valued for most of the crew members on board. Except for Chewbacca. I don't like Chewbacca," FRIDAY said with conviction.

"Aw... my little girl's feeling protective of her younger bro!" Tony cooed. He reached the end of the hall and checked to make sure Suffee wasn't waiting for him around the bend. "She still back in that room?" he asked.

FRIDAY flashed a camera light at him once to confirm, then continued their conversation eloquently. "Am not," FRIDAY argued.

"So was the rest of all that just sibling rivalry? Was ickle Fri-Fri feeling jel-ly of her new baby brother?"

"Don't call me that," FRIDAY demanded petulantly.
"Jealous," Tony sang softly as he reached the end of the hallway.

In retaliation, Friday slid the door close faster than it was theoretically able to. Tony ran face-first into it.

Chapter End Notes

Ala Ja - Jedi coward (in Dosh. As in the language. I found it over on Wookieepedia.)
Over on Fanfiction, I'd like to recommend the story of Iron Sith, by Illuviar.
He/she/they probably did a lot better than me and probably won't disappoint you. I haven't actually read it, but it sounds nice. Tony dies and a Sith is reborn in his body.
I'd like to read it but I can't, because if I do, it might bleed over into my story.
Plagiarizing's bad, kids. Don't do it. But feel free to tell me what happens, if any of you go over and see it!
And here's where I request your help! Is data pad one word or two? Actually, do they even have datapads in SW? Or do they use 'tablets,' 'terminals,' or something else?
Actually, why haven't I seen a single phone there yet? Do they just use the datapad/tablet/terminals? Also, these are the few named members of the 20-30 people crew (and family members of the crew). Help me find random nicknames for them?
Borr and Senn - father-son Aleena duo
Charrell - unknown (A.K.A. undecided. I'll make up my mind later), probably female.
We need more girls in this (I mean that in a totally respectful way. Imma girl).
Galee - near human (Arhan, in case you're interested)
Gis - Trandoshan
Greer - near human (exact species unknown), male
Kovlo - Rodian, dude
Kristofferson - human, guy
Shoragg and Hoviv - Rodian father-son duo
Suffee - Rodian
Quinton and Bai-Gon - Humans, cousins, dudes
Yes, I know I have long end notes. I'm a lonely, friendless person. Please take pity on me and chat me up.
**SI Rises Again**

**Chapter Summary**

There are several steps to rising in a community that wants to tear you down. You had to have something to offer, you had to make allies, you had to make yourself invaluable...

**Chapter Notes**

Please remember that I'm a failure and not to be too disappointed with me! :)

Also, I know that some of you are annoyed that I do partially-blanked curse words. I know because a Guest on Fanfiction started cursing me out in the review section. Pretty sure that was a 'flame.' I was stunned for a couple moments, then started laughing. It was hilarious (Huge difference, there. Fanfiction: Lots of views, but tough crowd. AO3: Less views, but very nice and polite people).

It's insurance. A few of my... 'friends' found out that I write fanfiction. If she gets onto my computer, sees one of my accounts, and shows my mom, my mom'd... do stuff...if she finds out I wrote -er, typed- those words. Look, cut me some slack. I'm not even allowed to call my brother B-O-Y because 'he has a name' and apparently 'it's dehumanizing.'

It's either partially-blanked words or I can use words like 'Firetruck/Fun-Sock,' 'Shiite-Religion/Shiny-Grits,' and 'Hello/Helium-Cells' instead. You'll have sentences like, 'Tony hissed, "Son of a beach!"' or, 'He was a massive whole!'
Your choice. Really.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leaving Kristoff waiting impatiently by the chairs, Tony all but slammed the box of rare herbs on the counter of the Bounty Hunter Guild Office. BHGO. Huh. Terrible name, really. It needed a better acronym. Like, BAIT (Bounty Associates In Training) should be taught by EHs (Expert Hunters), and they should meet up at the BLOB (Bounty Lounge and Other Bureacracy).

“What do you mean I have to wait for you have to inform-” Tony checked his the data pad, “-Crisseilla that they’re here? I sent notification two days ago that I found the last batch of the sprouts, and then a call six hours ago to tell you that I was six hours away!”

“Had to make sure it was not a false call,” the human over the counter said in a nasally voice. “Can’t anger the client, you see?”

Tony grit his teeth and glared. It was his fifteenth time turning in a bounty. He always succeeded in a hunt, bringing in the target in less than a week after accepting it. By all rights, he should have good credit. Then again, bounty hunting was less of a business than banking. Tony had thought he was being smart, calling ahead of time. Apparently, it made no difference.
“Thank you for your time,” Tony said stiffly. He turned and walked away. Kristoff saw the look on his face, rolled his eyes, and walked to the complementary bar off to the side. The drinks weren’t complementary, of course. They were probably ridiculously overpriced.

“You new here?” asked a thankfully much-friendlier voice.

“Relatively,” Tony said, reflexively deflecting to an answer that revealed as much as it didn’t.

“Unless it’s a high-yield bounty, they take forever to process. It’s best not to leave before they finish, though; someone could claim your bounty before you get back,” the apparently more experienced bounty hunter told him.

“Not my first rodeo,” Tony said dryly. He had nearly had to learn that lesson first-hand. Luckily, Kristoff had been there at that time, and he wasn’t nearly as trusting. The other bounty hunter mouthed the phrase curiously. “Badly translated expression from my homeworld,” Tony hastened to explain.

The man shrugged. “The name’s Haiyo,” he said, apparently not interested in pursuing the topic of homeplanets. Tony could respect that.

“Stark, Tony Stark,” he introduced himself. “Remember that name, ‘cause it’s going to be all over the HoloNet one day,” Tony claimed with mock bravado.

“Why? Going to get brought in for public displays of indecency?” the man snarked back.

Tony was delighted at the pure snark and guts. “More like personally congratulated by the Supreme Chancellor for humanitarian efforts,” Tony laughed, waving Kristoff over. “Oi, Kristeen! I found someone you’d get along with - he likes picking on me as much as you do!”

“Keep it up,” Kristoff said to Haiyo, not bothering to stop as he walked past, some female bounty hunter hanging off his arm. Tony looked at her appreciatively as they exited the building. Shrugging, he turned back to the bounty hunter.

“What does she see in him?” Haiyo muttered glumly.

“Been chasing after her for long?” Tony asked sympathetically, ordering a rum from the small bar along the back for the other bounty hunter.

“Since she nearly killed me, my second hunt,” the bounty hunter admitted ruefully. They both looked up as another bounty was processed, flashing on the giant screen. It didn’t belong to either of them, so they returned to their conversation. “Any girl waiting for you?”

Tony thought of loyal Pepper, who stood by him, even as she disapproved of his life choices. He hoped she found someone deserving of her. “Not anymore,” Tony said, raising his glass. “I’m a free man!”

Right as the mug reached its peak, there was an explosion at the front of the BHGO. Haiyo groaned, laying his head down on the counter as the rest of the bounty hunters in the building sprang into action.

“Mark Alpha I deployed,” FRIDAY told him discreetly.

“Should I be worried?” Tony asked, bringing the rum up for a sip. He shriveled his stool around to face the brawl, a blaster bolt passing inches from his face as he turned. He glanced back at the scorched wall, then turned his eyes back to the front just in time to see a body slump to the ground.
in front of him, neck steaming and blackened.

“Nah, it’s just Qulok’s Fist,” Haiyo bemoaned. “Other bounty hunting guild. Had it in for us when we stole a bounty right under their nose, though only in this guild. It’s just some healthy competition, friendly rivalry.”

Tony eyed the probably-dead body at his feet. “Just friendly rivalry,” he echoed. He switched his gaze from his empty mug and one of the rival guild’s members scrambling out from the back room with a body slung over his shoulders. It was just angles and trajectory, something Tony was intimately familiar with. Tony aimed his mug and threw it in an arc. It hit the man in the temple and he went down soundlessly. Two other members turned to him, ready to defend their fellow. “And that’s my cue,” Tony mused.

Standing up, Tony swung his barstool up and slammed it down on his next opponent’s head. He turned to the next one, about to do the same when a blaster bolt flew from behind him to hit the man in the chest. Tony looked back at Haiyo.

“You killed him.”

“You’re welcome,” Haiyo said.

“I prefer not to kill,” Tony said pointedly.

“And I am slag at disabling,” Haiyo excused his actions.

“Keep yourself out of this fight,” Tony told him. “Please,” he added, seeing the look on the other’s face and knowing he had no authority over the other’s actions. Haiyo looked at him speculatively, nodding and reaching for another bottle. Tony grabbed his watch and pulled it over his hand, transforming it into a repulsor-glove. Setting it to a more harmless power, he started blasting the rival guild members on their armored torsos, knocking them back and giving his guild more breathing room.

FRIDAY whistled in his ear, slowly raising the pitch. As it reached a C-sharp, Tony twisted his back towards the window, holding his arms slightly to the side. Mark Alpha I flew in through the broken window and folded seamlessly around him, the shiny, mostly-finished armor looking out of place among the grubby, much less armored bounty hunters. “Set to stun,” FRIDAY chirped.

Tony sprang into action, this time able to shoot areas with less armor. Unlike the glove, which was more minimal and more of a last resort and therefore had lethal settings, the armor had a wide range of capabilities, several of which was of a capture-not-kill variety.

FRIDAY and Tony worked in tandem, FRIDAY predicting Tony’s movements almost before he made them. When one of Tony’s shots nearly went wide, FRIDAY adjusted it so it merely grazed it’s recipient instead of the man’s face. Tony, immediately feeling the slight, nearly unnoticeable adjustment to his wrist placement, unconsciously gave a nod to his co-pilot. Just because the repulsors were set on stun didn’t mean they couldn’t be lethal near delicate areas, such as the eyes, portions of the face, and neck.

The fight was over within moments. The members of the Bounty Hunter’s Guild stood, panting over the fallen members of Qulok’s Fist. Slowly, they all turned to look at him. A low whistle and some dry, sarcastic clapping resounded from the bar. Tony raised a middle finger in that general direction.

“You’re one of ours?” a younger hunter bleeding from a cut on his head asked. “Haven’t seen you
around.”

“I’m relatively new,” Tony said, feeling a light sense of deja-vu.

“That’s some swell armor,” another commented.

Tony was suddenly aware of all the greedy glances at his armor. He was abruptly reminded that most of these men, including himself and Haiyo, were experienced killers and was suddenly glad he only finished the torso and arms of the Alpha I. If he finished any more, he wasn’t sure that his peers wouldn’t try to steal the impressive armor off of his cold corpse. Not that they would have succeeded. “Thanks,” he said.

“Break it up, settle down,” Kristoff said, wading through the crowd. “Who’s going to claim the bounties on these guys?”

Apparently, it was the correct thing to say; there was a small squabble as some of the other bounty hunters grabbed an unconscious body or two, hoping that they had a bounty on their heads. Others weren’t as easily distracted, though.

“Snatched that from a Mandalorian, have you?” one hunter muttered lowly to him.

Unsure if it was a threat or a genuine question, Tony smiled and said, “I received it with good faith.” Of course, that was assuming that Kristoff didn’t cheat a few extra ounces from his suppliers.

“What’s the price?” some old, veteran of the trade asked Tony.

“Not for sale,” Tony answered.

“Rather short for a Mandalorian, aren’t ‘cha?” another bounty hunter snubbed Tony as Kristoff finally reached him. Tony looked at the man critically, then at the two bounty hunters flanking him. He as obviously the leader of that group.

Kristoff grinned. “You and I are going to get along!” he announced, slinging an arm over the man’s shoulders.

“Hey!” Tony said, affronted. “I’m your captain! Stop making cracks about my height!” He turned to the bounty hunter that had spoken. “Was that an insult? That sounded like an insult.”

“So, not for sale?” the man asked.

“I have some other gadgets, but not this one,” Tony deflected. This was a good time as any to network. Getting to know the professionals in each trade was a good way to get himself known. From there, he could change the world.

As expected, the bounty hunter went for the bait. “Excellent. I’d like to do business with you. If your devices are a third as useful as that nifty armor, it would be a boon to have.” There were murmurs of agreement from his small posse.

- Yeah, apparently I'm volatile, self-obsessed, don't play well with others -

With that, daily life changed yet again. Tony registered Stark Industries. It was done legally, if you overlooked FRIDAY setting the creation date of the company to several years ago. Tony wasn’t sure what the purpose of that was, seeing that he was starting from scratch, but he let FRIDAY have her fun. In any case, FRIDAY needed the experience. Coding and hacking were… different
experiences than back on Earth, or even alien tech in their home universe. Tony had noticed FRIDAY’s hesitate when it came to this universe’s tech, and they were going to get over it together.

To sell, Tony quickly whipped up a batch of obsolete SI products, from first-generation lightweight armor to grapples. Expanding magnetic nettings and communication units were enhanced with Galactic technology and laced with superior metals. Tony even took apart a standard emergency beacon to study it, then rebuilt it smaller and more compact - same range, half the size. Everything was patented.

It was true that Tony could’ve done better, exceptionally so, but the principles of business was against it; people simply didn’t like change. If he pushed too hard, the entire venture would collapse.

Honestly, for a society that was so advanced, they were so… primitive. The technology was amazing and widespread, yes, but it was raw, for a lack of better terms. It had potential to be more, but development had stagnated.

That was where Tony came in. Once he received enough funding, Tony was going to change the world on a galactic scale.

At the end of the week, Tony had a range of products ready for his first customer’s inspection. It was, of course, Janq Paramexor, the man from the BHGO confrontation. “No weapons,” he commented, looking over the wares with an experienced eye.

“Nope,” Tony agreed, letting a hint of darkness into his voice to tell the other bounty hunter he didn’t want to talk about it. “SI doesn’t sell weapons.” He passed over a some gadgets for inspection. STARK INDUSTRIES shined proudly on each of the products.

- Yeah, apparently I'm volatile, self-obsessed, don't play well with others -

Alarmed, Tony looked up as someone walked into the empty storage room, looking much like he had his hand caught in the cookie jar. A hole was cut into the wall, the dock outside the Millennium Falcon visible. Tony had several buckets of brassy-colored egg-shaped contraptions surrounding him, and he was in the middle pouring the contents of one of the buckets into the space between the inner walls and the outer wall.

“What are you doing?” Suffee asked mildly.

“It’s hard to explain,” Tony excused.

“So would you rather explain it now, or maybe sometime after we get on our way?” Suffee offered. “Just let me know if it’ll affect the amount of hyperfuel used or if I should be careful to make sure this side of the ship doesn’t get hit.”

Tony peered at her. “Not going to make me tell you?” Rogers had been pretty firm about what he thought of that - ‘Sometimes my teammates don’t tell me things.’ Ha! While hiding the fact he knew of his parents’ double-murder.

“I trust you,” Suffee said.

And didn’t that burn? It all boiled down to trust. Rogers didn’t trust Tony, even going as far as to chuck his patriotic metal frisbee at Tony’s head at the word of a known terrorist. Meanwhile, there was Suffee, who had known him for a fraction of the time that Rogers did, letting him off the hook.
“Besides, you’ll be on this ship too,” Suffee added. “If it was a bomb or anything, you wouldn’t survive either.”

That… made a lot more sense, actually. Tony grasped onto that reason, eagerly defending his point. “Yeah, not a bomb. Just… emergency power. You see, if they get a good hit through the shield, our generator’s compromised. We’d be floating dead. Terrible design flaw, really. I’m still working on that. Anyways, these are mini repulsors. They’ll give us some mobility. They can also be used as a last resort.”

Suffee shrugged. “Okay. Just tell Kristoff. He’s going to be the one flying if we get shot at.”

Tony watched, confused, as he walked away. Suffee didn’t care about the ‘last resort,’ content just to get the main function. It was nice being… trusted. Because that was what it was; trust.

Tapping at the earpiece, Tony ordered, “Friday - Kristoff.”

A moment later, Kristoff’s gruff voice answered, “Yeah?”

“So… I added a new invention into the walls…” Tony began.

- Yeah, apparently I’m volatile, self-obsessed, don’t play well with others -

After weeks of careful tracking, Tony approached the men from that BHGO fight. “Hey, are you looking to make extra money?” They looked up from their sabacc game in mild interest. “Those gadgets I’ve been selling you? Think you can sell them on a more massive scale?”

“Well do it through us?” Janq Paramexor, the chosen spokesman of the group asked.

“They just been patented. We’ve hit a problem, though; my company isn’t recognized yet. When placed next to other tools, bounty hunters choose brands they’re more familiar with.”

“And what makes you think we can do any better?” the man rephrased.

Tony decided to put all his cards on the table. “Because your group is a lot bigger than you pretend it is.” Tony had been tracking where they brought his inventions. “You have a base on the outer rim, one in the core world, and two in the middle. My guess is that you’re part of your own subgroup of bounty hunters, most likely an officer. There’s roughly a hundred of you.” The last part he just estimated from the size of their orders.

“Smart,” the bounty hunter said, turning back to his game. From his non-reaction, Tony knew he underestimated the size of the group. More than a hundred and fifty, but not more than three hundred. “Ten thousand credits a month.”

“Twenty-five percent of the profit,” Tony countered. The man glanced up with a smirk.

“Smart,” he grudgingly admitted once more.

- Yeah, apparently I’m volatile, self-obsessed, don’t play well with others -

Even with his side-business, he couldn’t neglect his crewmates. They still went on missions, but this time, Tony would stay back every so often to tinker. Tony would call them teammates, maybe even friends, but he was hesitant to do so after the Civil War Incidence. He was… afraid… to let them close. Even so, he couldn’t help it. They were growing on him. Like mold, or fungus, or some sort of tumor.
He first noticed it during a mission to retrieve some blueprints that some other group stole from the inventing company. Having been the victim of several cases of industrial espionage himself, Tony was determined to do the fledgling company right by giving them back their plans, even if they couldn’t offer him that much money. Credits. Whatever.

Stuff like that… led to situations like this.

They had been chasing down another starship, one that wasn’t outfitted for a race, unlike the ‘Falcon. Signal disruptors made sure that FRIDAY couldn’t remotely hack the ship, even if their transmitters had been on. Still, Tony thought it was going to be a relatively peaceful forcibly-board-the-ship-and-steal-and-delete-the-data sort of thing, but apparently not. Someone on that ship apparently messed up big-time on the ship’s design, because NOTHING was where it was supposed to be. Tony was almost amazed that the rust-bucket could even fly.

They had to split up. Tony was now in the newly-minted ‘distraction’ group, drawing attention from FRIDAY and her protectors. Everything was going as well as a far as a hostile takeover could go, when Suffee hissed, dropping the blaster to clutch at his shoulder instead. A quick glance showed that the random, somewhat ambiguous machine beside him was running.

“Suffee?” Tony asked, alarmed. There wasn’t any blood, but he didn’t know the function of the machine. He checked the hall again - Greer was all the way at the other end, ducking occasionally around the corner to shoot off a few blaster bolts and duck back. Seeing no immediate danger, Tony slid to a stop next to Suffee, manually scanning him with his gauntlet.

“I’m fine,” Suffee growled out, glaring at the strange device on the wall.

“No internal bleeding,” FRIDAY’s computerized voice said, right as the machine started humming again. Tony checked his chances. He could most likely shut it down to examine it later, but Suffee was cringing away from it. Whatever had happened could happen again.

Tony turned and blasted the machine.

“Friday, there’s a machine on the wall. Get the blueprints and find out what it does. If you can’t find it, go back and scan it.” Tony ordered hastily, slinging Suffee’s arm around his shoulder and allowing himself to be used as a crutch.

“I messed up,” Kovlo said bluntly. “We have about seven minutes before this thing blows.”

“What?!” Tony demanded.

“I told you!” Tony heard Kristoff say as Chewbacca howled in Wookie. “I kriffing told you!”

“Remind me to learn Wookie.” Tony shook his head, knowing that he wouldn’t be getting anything else out of the three at the moment. “Retreat. Clear out. Abandon ship. FRIDAY, get the files and get out.” Now wasn’t the time, anyways. He took another step and the weight against him abruptly lightened.

“I’m fine,” Suffee ground out, pulling away and standing on his own. “The mission.” Greer stumbled into him as he backed into him, still firing. An automated voice came over the PA system and bolts stopped flying in their direction, the ship’s crew readily abandoning their vessel.

“Is not as important as the wellbeing of my team,” Tony snapped out.

“Friday, the stolen files first.”
“Heck no. Friday, find out what that thing does,” Tony countered.

Glaring, Suffee ripped off the shoulder of his shirt. The pebbly skin where the thing blasted him was now cracked and warped in a way Tony was unfamiliar with. It was several shades darker than the rest of his arm. “Burns,” Suffee said shortly. “It was most likely a forge or kiln of some sort. I am fine.”

“Five minutes,” Kovlo warned.

“Boss, I don’t think I can find both of the files and get out within five minutes,” FRIDAY told him absentmindedly in a way that told Tony she was submerged in the ship servors. “Permission to stay onboard to transmit the files to the ‘Falcon?”

“No,” Tony snapped without thinking.

“Boss, this isn’t me,” FRIDAY said, sounding exasperated. “Most of my coding is downloaded within the ‘Falcon. My main matrix will be unaffected by the loss of this orb.”

Tony hesitated. It was technically true. The only thing FRIDAY would be losing was this copy of her, and the memory files recently created throughout the mission. But… Tony wasn’t going to allow his girl to die a death, even a small one. Even a partial one. She was his daughter.

But Suffee… What if that thing was actually dangerous? Suffee could have been poisoned or something. What if she died, this one a complete death instead of FRIDAY’s partial one?

“Friday…” Tony began.

“Friday, download what we came here for and get out of there,” Suffee ordered, taking advantage of his hesitation.

“Aye-aye, captain!” FRIDAY said.

Tony open his mouth to recend those orders.

“No,” Suffee said firmly. “She’s your daughter, isn’t she? She’s alive. I’m not letting you choose between a friend and your own daughter.”

Tony was stunned. Of course FRIDAY was his daughter. She thought, she loved, she lived. It was something the Ex-avengers could never grasp. How did Suffee, someone who could only claim to know him for a handful of weeks-

“Get out of there, you idiots!” Kristoff howled into their ears. “The ship’s about to blow in, like, a minute. Quit the waterworks, stop acting like hormonal, teenage girly-girls, and get out of there! Yes, we all know that you’re Friday’s dad! Boo-hoo, don’t get exploded!”

- Yeah, apparently I’m volatile, self-obsessed, don't play well with others -

“So… you know that I consider Friday my daughter?” Tony said hopefully, breathing heavily. Suffee turned his head to look incredulously at him from where he was laying, panting, on the floor next to him. The Millennium Falcon blasted away from the exploding starship. Tony could see it from the window, but despite the fantastic lightshow, there was no sound.

“Well, it’s not as if you’ve been rubbing that in our faces every chance you got,” Kristoff drawled sarcastically. Behind him, Greer nodded glumly.
“You kind of have,” Galee pointed out from over by the console.

Suffee hissed as Shoragg prodded his wound. “Nasty burn,” the unwounded Rodian muttered.

“So it was actually a burn?” Tony asked hopefully. He had received his fair share of burns, but it was hard to tell on another species when the burns weren’t so bad. He honestly never thought of how burned scales would look. He’d never had the urge to go around burning lizards or anything like that.

“I think a medic would be a valuable addition to the crew,” Suffee hinted heavily.

“Just get a medical droid,” Kristoff brushed off. “You can’t trust any humans these days.”

“I definitely would not trust you near my internal organs,” Kovlo agreed.

Amid good-natured ribbing, Tony laid his head down. He missed the feeling of belonging. With no knowledge of his previous wealth and high class, he was easily accepted into the group of ex-repairmen. Tony hoped that it would last.

- Yeah, apparently I'm volatile, self-obsessed, don't play well with others -

The HoloNet was convoluted, a processor-ache for an AI of FRIDAY’s caliber. A lesser AI, perhaps like the droids that were often used as paperpushers or lazy manual labor, would have happily done the job without any outward consequences, but FRIDAY wasn’t accessing the information through the terminal, she was directly in the flow of data.

Unlike Earth’s Internet, where everything was more or less connected to each other in a spiderweb, the Holonet was like a tangled ball of string. Instead of going almost directly to the information right away, FRIDAY had to follow a long road of data, passing terabyte after terabyte of information to get to what she needed to find.

A part of the problem lay within the size of the galaxy. Simply put, it was too big for the current transmitters available. Many sections of the galaxy had their own mini internet that was somewhat connected to a portion of the main holonet. If not, then they were attached to a nearby internet sphere, which was connected to another, which was connected to another, that was sometimes connected to the Holonet. It was frustrating.

FRIDAY tagged it as another thing to go over with her Creator, sending everything to the ship’s servor. One of her side programs running the ship gave a ping. Noting that it was about Creator, FRIDAY threw everything else aside, scanning the script as she simultaneously accessed the feed of the workshop.

Creator looked up. “Yes, Friday?”

Not expecting her Creator to sense that she was watching immediately, FRIDAY was thrown for a second before her slower ship processors brought up the correct file: to reassure the crew, Creator rigged the cameras of the ship so that the green light on the side of the lens turned off and on for a quick second whenever FRIDAY personally observed through the feed.

Sluggish processors read the small notation sent by the program. FRIDAY turned her attention to the device on the counter - a first generation StarkPhone. FRIDAY was grateful to see Creator waiting patiently for her processor to discern why that ping was sent and formulate expositions. It could simply be made for profit, but that seemed too simple an idea. Unless...

“Boss… You decided to recreate phones simply because you missed people walking with their
heads down and bumping into each other?” FRIDAY asked, confused.

“What? No! I would never!” Creator proclaimed. “Is it so hard to imagine that I wanted to advance technology in a different field?”

“Logically, the StarkPhones will face much pushback, with SI being an unknown organization. Major technological companies will attempt to crush the idea or steal it as their own,” FRIDAY observed.

“That’s where you come in, Fri! You can keep track of them for me,” Creator said, with confidence in her. FRIDAY didn’t want to tell him otherwise, but… now was the correct time to let him in on the problem.

“Boss? I’m afraid my processor is not strong enough to do so on such a scattered connection. The Holonet is not a unified web. It is several webs that intersect at several points. I cannot help you as I could at home…”

Chapter End Notes

You know what? I think I'm making this way harder than it has to be. I was researching Star Wars species and planets for six whole hours, with zero breaks when I had a realization: this is just a story. Why the heck am I putting this much effort into Arkanians and Electromesh? The O'reenian class differences won't have an effect on this story and Pau'an history isn't necessary. None of you guys care if I carefully describe why the people of Hapan hate outsiders.

Seriously, what is WRONG with me? I'm writing this for fun. This is supposed to unstress me, not make me stress and worry and give me work! I don't need to be /that/ factually accurate, right? If you're actually offended by this, just read over my work and tell me how to correct it.

That being said... I need some help. Please answer these questions if you can: When was the exact Galactic year (like, BBY) and age of Obi-Wan when he became a Padawan, when he meets Satine, and when he becomes a knight?
Hashtags and Paper Bags

Chapter Summary

Because Tony tries to help people, inside the suit and out. That's just who he is, superhero or not.

Chapter Notes

Wow, okay. You guys were very supportive about the last AN. Didn't expect that. Anyways, I'll be tweaking canon to fit my tastes (or imagination, seeing that I haven't watched SW, still). You can see it starting here, with how I describe Coruscant. Or you can chalk it up to 'unreliable narrator,' Tony changing the galaxy, or SW society is just that messed up. Doesn't matter which. YOLO. Peace out. Hi, M&K, welcome to the club.

I've never had Twitter, Tumbler, Vine, or whatever people my age use, so whatever. The only thing I have is Facebook. Once again, YOLO.

Anyways, early chapter. Early by a whole week. It's an apology for the late update on chapter 8. I love my cliffhangers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first month and a half of single-handedly running the brand-new SI had actually been fun for Tony. It was just the way he liked it. He worked at his own rate (all day, every day) on things he wanted to (including the promised Iron Maiden armor). He didn’t even need to humor a board. Time slipped away with a familiar fluidity that Tony was so familiar with. Yes, he let other people into his haven, but Tony almost had a heart attack and barely stopped himself from banning Gis from the workshop after the Saurin nearly cut his own hand off. Tony had to wonder if this was the way his father felt, and if Howard had been a better father than he had thought.

His inventions were good. Too good.

The message came in a scant month after SI lifted off the ground. Summons to go to Coruscant for a meeting with potential investors. Apparently, some upstart businessmen took notice of some of his non-lethal weapons and wanted to ‘improve’ them. Tony very much knew what it meant - both an offering and a threat. They wanted to weaponize his things and militarize its use. If he didn’t go, they’d steal his designs anyway. Tony wouldn’t let his stuff be used to take innocent lives again. He had to go. Sending a suitably enthusiastic message back to delay them, he set a date almost a whole month later. A whole month that he used to build his case.

Tony had already decided to keep SI in his hands. That was nonnegotiable. What he could do, however, was go to Coruscant to spread publicity and dabble around with technologies only sold there. Coruscant was an Elite planet of Elitists. Snobs. They had inventions and privileges they kept only for themselves. From what he heard from other bounty hunters, even a homeless beggar on Coruscant looked down on relatively well-off people from other planets.
Tony was sure they were joking. Bounty hunters tend to be a caustic bunch.

That point aside, Tony was headed towards the big city. Planet. Whatever.

Of course, he didn’t take the straight way. It was more of a longabout way, hopping from planet to planet, system to system, selling and trading goods to pay for Tony’s workshop funds, hyperfuel - gotta take that down to the molecules and find out how it worked - and the crew’s pay. Kristoff was understandably nervous about returning to a place that had a bounty on him, but Tony secretly paid the lady the ex-smuggler swindled and promised to bring her some necklace from one of their stops. He didn’t tell Kristoff - it would be a nice surprise.

It was on one of these such planet-hops that Tony was introduced to a problem much more rampant than criminals running amok and he couldn’t help but wonder if this type of thing happened back on Earth, too, and that he just didn’t notice.

"I’m just not the hero type. Clearly."

Tony was strolling back towards the ship, a scrap of phrik in his pocket from one of the stores that actually sold ship parts. They had run across an artifact that had a small percentage of phrik in the alloy. Phrik was prick, watered down or not, and Tony had his hands on it at a “discount rate,” after buying some durasteel plates for his ship and promising to deal with only them for more alloys and parts whenever he was in the system.

It was rather expensive and the alloy had twelve percent less phrik than they said it did, but Tony thought it was a pretty fair deal, considering the fact that FRIDAY estimated that they would be put out of business within the next three years by an upcoming business that opened a year ago, just down the street. He wasn’t planning on coming back here anytime soon, anyways.

His clothes - a slightly stained T-shirt and a pair of something that resembled jeans - were not part of the typical wardrobe around here, but they helped him fit in a lot more than the more clean flightsuit-style clothes he usually preferred to use in combat situations. As rare as it was, Tony felt strangely underdressed. The slightly medieval clothes were conservative and well-kept, despite being worn out. Tony’s T-shirt, though of a moderate quality, was just plain grubby next to them. The civilians gave him a wide berth as he walked, but it was for all of the wrong reasons.

The civilians were gossiping about him, that much he knew. Tony rather wished he kept FRIDAY’s advice of changing his clothes before he disembarked the ‘Falcon, but it was all too late for that, now. Figuring that a slightly pricey purchase would dissolve some of the more venomous remarks, Tony headed towards the stall with relatively expensive prices on its signs. It happened to sell some exotic sandwiches.

The hawker at the stand turned his nose up at Tony, explaining in the most uppity tone Tony had come across yet, that Tony would simply be unable to afford the scrumptious food provided by the stand. The hawker was promptly shoved by his sister, who gave him a nasty look and turned to explain to Tony in a kindly tone exactly what the hawker said, though admittedly in nicer words.

Opening his credit pouch abruptly shut up the siblings, who all but fell over themselves to please him. Yes, Tony would be glad when it was time for them to leave.

After buying several of some sort of meaty, steak-y sandwich for a handful of credits - hey, he was allowed to indulge himself - Tony wandered around the marketplace, wondering if any of the more worn-down stalls were run by Kristoff’s contacts. He was actually going to ask one of them, but the look on the Duro’s face when he started hinting at it warned him off. Standing half-hidden in some racks, clothes discreetly out of sight, Tony flirted with some of the ladies running the stalls, several
of which were hoping to escape their small-planet life and may their way among the stars, but none of them had any worthwhile skills. He eventually decided this was not the place to recruit, heading back to the ship.

That was when he tripped over the man.

“Whoa!” Tony said, arms flailing for a moment before Extremis flared with his emotions, allowing himself to abruptly catch himself before he fell and hit his head on the alley walls. Why was it always alleys? “Sorry,” he apologized to the lump on the ground. “Didn’t see you there…”

He paused as a dusty hand reached out, grabbing a paper bag with a bottle of some sort in it. The sheets shifted, allowing a dirty man to sit up and chug at whatever was in the bottle. Tony suspected moonshine or some other contraband. “S’okay,” the man slurred out blearily, peering up at Tony.

Tony’s blood froze. He knew that face. “Happy?”

The man’s face scrunched up in confusion. “Nah, ’m unhappy!” he chortled at what he saw as a clever play on words.

Tony calmed his breathing, taking a moment to objectively examine the situation. Happy practiced abstinence. He would never touch a bottle of alcohol.

Looking back at the man trying to coax another couple drops out, he could now clearly see that it wasn’t, in fact, Happy. Though the brown eyes were identical, the facial features on this man were softer, despite being hollowed by hunger. He wasn’t a doppelganger of his bodyguard-friend, maybe a brother of the doppelganger.

Then, the man turned his eyes on Tony. Tony’s breath caught in his throat. The man’s brown eyes were unnaturally sharp, despite his obvious drunkenness. “You ‘kay?” the man asked in concern.

Taken aback, Tony resisted the urge to step back. The man was homeless, but he was asking if Tony was okay? Tony might not be rich anymore, might not be dressed in his traditional ratty engineering clothes, but this man needed more help than he did.

“Yeah, you?” Tony’s throat closed. He cleared it. “Do you need any help?”

“Open?” He lifted a sealed bottle towards Tony.

“I’m probably the last person who should be saying this, but drinking’s bad for you.” Tony opened it anyways and handed it back, sitting down next to the man on his blanket when he patted it in invitation. He passed over his entire bag of sandwiches. If his crew wanted some, they could buy them themselves this time. Happy’s-brother-from-an-alternative-universe needed it more than them.

“Got nothin’ left nee-ways,” the man grumbled good-naturedly. “’M Ch’rles,” he introduced himself.

“Tony Stark,” Tony answered automatically. Charles? That sounded nothing like ‘Happy.’ Still, Charles had said he had nothing left. The least Tony could do was give him some company. As such, he accepted the bottle that Charles handed to him, popping open the cap and taking a cautious sip. It burned like disinfectant, a reminder of his misspent college years. Tony grinned and took a slightly bigger gulp.

They spent a little over an hour bemoaning their lives and eating the sandwiches. To his dismay,
Tony found that having Extremis in his bloodstream meant he couldn’t be drunk or even tipsy. It burned all the alcohol out of his system before it really even entered. On the bright side, no alcohol poisoning. On a more worrying side, he had to switch their drinks for some juice he picked up earlier - FRIDAY alerted him that he was starting to get feverish, probably due to the active Extremis. Tony hadn’t even noticed.

Tony learned that Charles’s wife ran off with her secret boyfriend after stealing all his money, taking their underage two children with her. She cried foul and had his guardianship of their children rescinded, on the grounds that they weren’t his children at all - she had been cheating on him for over two decades. His children wanted to be with him, but without a job or home, he couldn’t take them back anyways.

FRIDAY confirmed this was all true, but also pointed out several loopholes that could potentially get Charles his children back. Unfortunately, without a home Charles still could not take custody of his children. It was a sad story that made Tony feel guilty that all that happened to him was getting thrown headfirst into a second chance. Of course, this was when everything went wrong.

“Oi, don’t you know that being drunk and disorderly in this district is a felony?” Tony looked up to see two approaching peacekeepers. Their most defining features were that one had a toothbrush-style mustache, while the other had Harry-Potter spectacles.

“Boss, being drunk does not constitute as a felony in this sector. They’re just required to give a warning and make sure you get off the streets,” FRIDAY told Tony without prompting. “The-

she cut herself off as the peacekeeper swung his baton at Tony’s head. Tony lifted his arm to block the hit with his forearm. “I’m sending Kristoff and Chewbacca over,” FRIDAY informed Tony seriously, none of her usual disdain for the Wookie showing.

A yelp from Charles had Tony throwing an alarmed glance over to where the mustached peacekeeper had knocked Charles over with an electrified buzz of his baton.

“Hey!” Tony shouted, wrenching Mustache’s baton out of his hands. “It is not illegal to drink in this sector, and I’m perfectly sober!”

Mustache and Spectacles sneered. “You’re under arrest for assaulting an officer of the law!” Spectacles claimed, tossing his baton in the air. Tony ducked out of the way, and Mustache grabbed spun it lazily.

“Yeah, no,” Tony answered, glancing warily at Mustache from where the man was standing off to his side. “You assaulted us first.”

“You won’t be saying that after the next fifteen minutes,” Spectacles threatened.

“Is that a threat?” Tony asked. He was immediately embarrassed with himself for using such a cliché phrase, but Spectacles merely smirked at him.

To his eternal mortification, Tony was caught off guard by Mustache, who had snuck in from his side while he was distracted by Spectacles. It was probably the oldest trick in the book, and Tony had fallen for it. Tony’s limbs locked up under the electrical currents. FRIDAY’s alarmed shouts in his ear flickered off and on, but Tony couldn’t tell if it was because of the earpiece shorting out or because he went momentarily unconscious.

When he finally came to, his ribs ached in a way that told him that they were just fractured less than a minute ago. They were inconsequential; he had been eating regularly and they would finish healing in just another minute. What was more concerning were the peacekeepers, who were
beating on Charles.

“Hey! Pick on someone your own size,” Tony yelled. He then realized they were taller than him, but that wasn’t the point. When Spectacles came for him, Tony knocked him out quickly and painlessly with a rabbit punch to the temples.

Tony held his fists up, ready for a brawl with Mustache, but he didn’t need to. The man collapsed on the ground, revealing a Wookie. “He isn’t dead, is he?” Tony asked rhetorically as he kneeled down next to Charles, Kristoff next to him. The other man’s fingers fluttered up and down Charles’s side with deceptive softness. Chewbacca shook his head and tossed the man on top of his comrade.

“I have the footage,” FRIDAY told him grimly as Tony scanned Charles. “No broken bones,” she added.

Kristoff must have been listening, or perhaps he finished his own inspection, because he moved Charles to a sitting position and started to pull him up. “They didn’t break any bones,” Kristoff told Tony, dispelling that thought. Kristoff wouldn’t have just paraphrased FRIDAY’s words if he had heard her. Tony gave the ex-smuggler a long look and wondered how many broken bones the man must have received to know so quickly.

“Great, send them to the police station, the local news stations, everything,” Tony told FRIDAY, tapping his earpiece to tell his friends who he was talking to. He nodded to Kristoff, throwing Charles’s other arm over his shoulder.

“Done,” FRIDAY said.

“How much?” Kristoff asked.

“Back to the ship. Meet our newest crewmate,” Tony announced. FRIDAY played a recording of Pepper clearing her throat. “If he consents, of course,” Tony added.

-I'm just not the hero type. Clearly.-

Tony let the holographic code for his latest project gently revolve. It was completely built in Earth coding, Italian-based. It wasn't sentient like FRIDAY, JARVIS, or any of his robot kids were, but it was aware. It wouldn’t abolish events like what happened with Charles, but maybe it would give people a pause before afflicting such cruelty.

Tony didn’t expect this to take off immediately, maybe not even in a few years, but it was a start. In all honesty, it started as a sham to gain legal access to some satellites, giving FRIDAY more width and leeway. Slowly hacking and crawling through programming was fine and all, but the chances of getting caught were always there. This way, there was less chance that FRIDAY would be caught.

One of the differences between Earth and this galaxy was the media. Sure, there were news and discussion boards on the ‘holonet’ or whatever, but normal social media sites were seriously lacking. Twitter, Vine, Snapchat… all those short memes and clip compilations of people getting hit in the groin area were seriously lacking. In the Republic, each and every planet had its own tiny group of funny stuff, but nothing was shared on a galactic level. Maybe his would be different.

Technically, there were a multiple sites, but they were hard to find, buried under layers of ‘real’ stuff. Only die-hard fans could find them. They were also highly divided. The fans only frequented one site or the other, based on their individual planets.
Tony wanted to change that, hence the new program.

It had took a lot of pleading, promises, and a starting pay, but Tony had traded some of his signal amplifiers and several contracts to a HoloFeed company for his website-thing to use their satellites.

He exhaled. “Launch it, Fri,” he said. The percent bar appeared, going to a hundred almost immediately. StarkWeb was active. Tony’s fingers ghosted over the keys.

#IAmHere

Well, this is me and here I am!

Underneath, Tony posted a short bio and a funny picture of himself wandering the streets of Eepis Haal, one their traditional carrying bags wrongly used as a hat. He also put random clips of various explosions he made while testing chemicals, the time he got chewed out by one of the Aleena for violating one of their traditions, and a security feed of the ‘Falcon’s latest, semi-failed landing. In his defense, Gis did it. He looked at his post again, then went back to delete the exclamation point.

He posted it. It was Basic, but would change languages based on the viewer preference.

A ping made him look at the activity log. A new user! Already? Wha-

Tony blinked as he looked at the profile pic. It was a glowing pink orb reminiscent of JARVIS. “Fri?”

FRIDAY had posted her own clips, a much funnier range of mistakes by the crew, from Tony getting hit by the FRIDAY-Orb to the tug-O-war between Gis and all the Aleena on the ship. Gis had won by a landslide, only to be dogpiled by the entire group.

#IAmHere

Hi! I'm Friday, Tony's go-to gal!

Underneath it was a bunch of peppy quotes and just overall... peppiness... that Tony didn't realize FRIDAY was capable of. “With you to the end,” FRIDAY said.

“Did I even use the hashtag correctly? I never joined Twitter or SnapChat or whatever.”

“I don’t know. Miss Potts and the PR division took care of your social media accounts.”

“That explains a lot.”

Both Tony and FRIDAY stopped their lazy banter as the news feed for StarkWeb alerted them that there was a new post. Neither of them had posted anything. FRIDAY pulled up the newest post. It was a stunning picture of Galee against the sunset of one of the planets they were recently on, beaming at the viewers and hair flying everywhere.

Tony glanced at Galee, at the other terminal. “Peace out,” she said, using one of the Earth terms he introduced to the crew. She threw up two fingers.

Another ping alerted him to... Suffee? There was no picture of the Rodian to be seen, just several interestingly angled pictures of the places they’ve been and the people they saw.

Greer had made one too, only there was single, blurry picture of some unidentifiable blue thing.

Suffee’s Chiss friend had joined and friended Galee. A friend request was sent to him too.
Then there was a whole wave of new users and posts. Tony recognized some of the Aleenas’s relatives and some Rodians that looked surprisingly similar to Shoragg. And was that one of the slaves they had freed? Where did he get a terminal - he had insisted on being dropped off on a backwater moon…

Tony checked again. Every single one of them, Tony recognized by face, if not name, from Janq Paramexor to one of the people whose bounty he fulfilled. “What…?” he asked, looking at his crew.

“We asked Friday what you were doing and she told us. I’ve been waiting for forever to show off that pic!” Galee gushed.

“I thought it would be ‘cool,’” Quinton said. “I don’t like your font.”

“You wanted to spread the word on your HoloSite, so we spread the word for you. Our family members, people we’ve befriended, all our contacts, everyone we met the last couple of days,” Suffee explained.

-I'm just not the hero type. Clearly.-

After that first, initial burst of users and posts, the HoloSite went silent. No new accounts were created and no new pictures or comments were posted. Honestly, Tony and FRIDAY would have loved to help the HoloSite flourish, but neither of them were experienced in PR. They were forced to just let it be. Besides, the reason Tony created it in the first place was accomplished - FRIDAY now had a finger in roughly - very roughly - a twentieth of the Republic’s HoloWeb. She could manipulate or control it like JARVIS had with Earth’s internet, but it was a start.

Over the next couple days, the little hashtag - a new concept for this galaxy - was viewed with curiosity by several avid Holonet Surfers, though it was mostly unknown. Then, some enterprising soul from Alderaan created an account.

#IAMHere.

Hi. You can call me Jaime.

There were a couple of pictures of a human-looking girl (Tony knew better than to assume) smiling shyly at the camera, then several more Alderaanian sights and a furry thing with too-big eyes. It was probably their version of cat pictures.

Two more profiles were created, probably her friends - both teens were from Alderaan. They held personable pictures and generic descriptions.

The next day, someone from Tatooine posted, a young moisture farmer. His #IAMHere was exactly what Tony was looking for. It held both hardship and hope. From Tony’s discussions with the natives there, there was supposed to be wild slave trading business. The pictures didn’t show that, but that was fine. The galaxy had to get used to this new form of communication first.

The first girl commented on the moisture farmer’s picture of a huge dust storm, and the moisture farmer replied back. They continued on that thread for a while, getting more comfortable with talking to each other. Tony interrupted their causal barrage of posts to mention they could both ‘friend’ and ‘message’ each other.

The posts on that thread stopped after that, but the boy mustered up his guts after a minute and messaged her (Technically, Tony wasn’t supposed to know that, but being the creator of the site has its perks - he saw everything that happened).
Corellia rocks. That guy on the speeder is me.

This time, it was Corellia. Obviously. Anyways, the profile looked fine. There was a kid on a speeder. It seemed like people were starting to get the hang of it.

“Make sure no one posts anything inappropriate, will ya?” Tony asked FRIDAY.

A new post was sent in from Mandalore. Tony curiously opened it, but it was just a couple pictures of blasters and stuff like that. Tony shrugged and closed the feed.

-I'm just not the hero type. Clearly.-

Rubbing his hands in glee, Tony eagerly stole the bags Kristoff had lugged in, completely missing the other man’s jealousy at his superior strength. “Thanks, Kristy!” Tony belatedly thanked him. Kristoff shot off a light glare at him and waved him off in mock disgust.

Tony made a mental note to have the ex-smuggler reveal the locations of all the ‘underground trading centers’ he frequented. Phrik, Vibranium, and all the other metals were more costly there, but also more accessible than in official channels. Less regulated, you see. It was almost enough to build FRIDAY’s armor.

“Help me with the shading, will you?” he grunted, pouring the metal into the smelter. FRIDAY quickly ran calculations on the dye and bronzer and Tony added it into the molten metal. Under his careful watch, the silvery metal slowly pinkened. It was merely a blush of pink. “We’re going to need more. A lot more.”

Tony glanced out the window, seeing nothing but stars zooming by with dizzying speed. Time was running out. Just over three days until he had to be on Croissant or whatever, defending his products. Neither Iron Man nor Iron Maiden were completed, and his website - sorry, HoloSite - didn’t have a large enough fanbase. FRIDAY’s digs at the business were inconclusive.

At this rate, he’d have to do fireworks above the atmosphere or a huge display of his inventions right before the business meeting with those sharks. That would be the only way to get enough public attention, and even that could fail. It depended on how self-absorbed the Croissant-people actually were.

“Hey Fri? Feel like doing an aerial dance?”

-I'm just not the hero type. Clearly.-

Just a couple hours left until they reached Croissant. Tony was letting the Iron Maiden cool, instead by the terminal. FRIDAY was arranging the hundreds of glowing, blue dots in mesmerizing patterns. Along the outer walls of the ship, strange rolling could be heard, like sets of pool balls were sent spinning across. It thoroughly creeped out the crew, but Tony assured them it was nothing to worry about.

-I'm just not the hero type. Clearly.-

They were there, almost twenty-four hours before the meeting was to take place. FRIDAY had answered the airspace people’s hails, giving their reason for being there, paying the taxes, everything. They were there. Home of the Jedi. Capital of the Republic. Technological haven. It wasn’t what he expected.
Standing motionlessly at the window, Tony stared unblinkingly at the urban planet. It was impressive and terrifying at the same time, like his greatest dream perverted into a nightmare. The planet was completely overtaken by urban sprawl. The entire thing was a sickly gray color, with not a hint of green or blue.

“What happened to you?” Tony asked quietly, hand on the plexiglass of the window. Contrary to popular belief, Tony’s idea of a utopia was not a place where all wildlife was replaced by metals and steels, with circuits instead of grass and robots dogs instead of puppies. FRIDAY hummed in his ear, but she too was speechless.

It was not the dirty despair of Nar Shaddaa, but was somehow worse.

Skyscrapers speared the atmosphere. Factory buildings churned out synthetic oxygen in huge clouds. Speeders whipped past them. People shouting and honking at each other could be heard, even from up on the ship. There was not a plant to be seen. This was what his rivals would have had him do to Earth, just to prove a point.

This was a dead planet, just hanging on through life support. It could make nothing itself, depending on what was brought in from other planets to survive. Did none of the inhabitants see this?

“Steer to the other landing strip. This one will take hours,” Suffee sighed, sending a transmission. FRIDAY and Kristoff turned the ship and flew it to the top of the atmosphere.

“I know a place,” Kristoff reassured them. He let the ship drift. Tony glanced up. Neither Kristoff nor Suffee seemed concerned at the state of the planet. He looked away.

“Boss!” The ‘Falcon stopped short. Kristoff nearly face-planted onto his console, Tony had to grab a conveniently-there joystick to remain on his feet, and Suffee was thrown harshly against the wall with a sound that resembled a whimper.

Kristoff sat up and Tony wobbled upright, but Suffee stayed on the ground. Kristoff clutched his chest and hissing something at FRIDAY through his earpiece. Tony helped Suffee upright, pounding his back when the Rodian couldn't stop coughing. "What is it, Fri?" Tony asked, giving Kristoff a nasty glare. FRIDAY might've answered, but the words were lost to Tony. He was more preoccupied by what he saw outside.

A grey comet filled the viewing window, scraping across the front of the ship with a terrible shriek of metal on metal. The people inside were once again knocked down. Kristoff was fine, strapped down to the pilot’s chair, but Tony only had a second to shield the much more fragile Rodian with his body before they were knocked into a terminal. For a crazy moment, Tony realized that the cockpit had an unhealthy amount of angles and hard surfaces. Then, he had a split second to hope that the rest of the crew was okay. It was a thought that he immediately berated himself for - as a captain, his crew should have been his first concern.

That thought was cut off, however, because a moment later the ‘Falcon was hit by something much stronger than a mere graze and sent tumbling helplessly through the air like a leaf in the wind.

Chapter End Notes

The Charles scene wasn't as dark as I wanted to be, because I live a sheltered life.
Anyways, I think that in reality, SW would be much darker and poverty-stricken than what the movies showed. If any of you find a more SW-y human name for Charles, I will use it and delete this sentence.

Oh, and just to make it clear, I'm Civil War Team Iron Man. It's not going to be a big part of OISAMOW (Exvengers only appear briefly), but I can and will take pot shots and underhanded mentions, just warning you. Maybe Rogers didn't know that Bucky killed Tony's parents, but he DID know they were murdered. He could've said, "I came across information that a Winter Soldier killed your parents," but he didn't because he was 'sparing' himself (okay, I'm 101% sure I mooched that line from someone, but I don't know who). Just wanted to let you guys know. Don't hint about that in the comments (I don't care). You can have your opinions, but I have mine. Plus it's illegal to hide evidence of a murder. So... yeah. *Shrug*

I miss the first month of writing. Squealing in glee at a single 'Kudos,' that happy jump in your stomach when you realize that /25 people viewed your work that day! Now, I just peer at it, shrug, and continue on...

Except for reviews. Reviews are awesome.
"-ad!" Tony heard FRIDAY through the ringing in his ears. He opened his eyes but couldn't focus them on anything. "Dad!" The ringing abruptly stopped and Tony could hear Kristoff's disoriented groan and feel the ship vibrating underneath him. His skin prickled uncomfortably. There was a metallic taste on his tongue - blood. Those were four senses accounted for… what was left? Tony sniffed the air. He couldn't smell anything. The questionable blur before his face sharpened to Suffee's face, pinched in pain. His eyes were closed and he wasn't moving.

"Friday," Tony acknowledged his girl's shouts, moving shaking fingers to Suffee's neck. His heart stopped - he couldn't find a pulse. "Friday, what-"

"A ship entering the atmosphere exploded. It nearly crashed into us," FRIDAY said. Huh, not a comet-meteor thing like he thought, then. Tony's skin crawled again as he felt FRIDAY's heaviest and most invasive scanners at work. "I detected multiple hairline fractures on all three of you. Suffee has a concussion. You might have had one, but it is gone. There is nothing else of note."

A concussion. It wasn't good, but at least it wasn't death. Tony felt foolish for trying to find the carotid artery. Of course it wouldn't be in the exact same place he was used to finding it - Suffee wasn't human. Tony slid his hands under Suffee, flexing once to make sure he could bear his weight before actually picking up the Rodian. Were Rodians usually this light, or was this Extremis making him stronger?

Wait…

What was he forgetting?
"Oi, Stark!" Kristoff called as he circled the *Millennium Falcon* in place in the Coruscant atmosphere. "We have a… thing."

Tony strapped Suffee into one of the back seats, tugging firmly to make sure he was secure. "A 'thing?" Tony asked dubiously as he hurried to the pilot's seat, latching onto it as he stumbled. "We have many 'things.' Jewelry, luxury cloth, some very delicious berries that may or may not be poisonous…"

"A situation," Kristoff corrected himself, "of the life-threatening variety." He turned to look at Tony. "Not to us," he quickly specified upon seeing Tony's face.

"Boss, a ship exploded," FRIDAY explained again. "The ship is heading towards the city. Estimated deaths are in the mid-hundreds to lower thousands range if there is a full impact."

Oh. That was what he was forgetting.

"I think I can duck this ship under it, slow it down some," Kristoff offered grimly. He urged the *Falcon* into a slow dive, keeping the acceleration constant to reduce the stress on the passengers. "There'll be lots of damage to the *Falcon*, and I'm not sure the cockpit will make it, but we might be able to slow it down some, save a few extra lives with this stunt. I'll steer. You get everyone to the cargo hold. I'll angle it away from the impact."

Tony gave Kristoff an admiring glance at the man's self-sacrifice - the man had gone a long way from the self-serving a****** he appeared to be when they first met - but shook his head. He flipped open a hidden panel. "Bet now's a good time to show you what the orbs do," Tony mused, pressing a button hidden under it. "Friday."

Some panels under the hull of the *Millennium Falcon* slid open, spilling out hundreds of the egg-shaped orbs that Tony hid inside the walls of the ship several weeks ago. Kristoff blinked. "And what are those supposed to do?" he asked warily. Tony had to give him credit - even though he was clearly shaken and confused, the ex-smuggler held the *Falcon* at a steep dive, coming in close to the freefalling ship.

"Watch," Tony suggested with a grin, hiding his true anxiousness. In all honesty, his devices weren't meant to be used the way he was about to use them for. He actually made them as steering aids, in case one of the ship’s thrusters were taken out or to navigate particularly nasty asteroid fields. Unfortunately, the yacht that exploded was much bigger than the *Falcon*. He had no idea if there were enough of them or if it would work. The eggs split open like claws, blasting upwards towards the free falling yacht. They latched onto the underside, digging into the metal. The repulsors fired full-blast. Slowly, the falling ship decelerated.

"It's not enough!" Kristoff exclaimed in alarm, leaning forward as parts of the other ship's plates began buckling under the repulsors.

"Seat belt," Friday warned Tony disapprovingly. Tony automatically obeyed at the tone of her voice, glancing over to see that Kristoff already had his on. Traitor.

"Open a transmission to the ship! Can you increase the power in any way, Friday?" Tony asked.

"Deploying suit," FRIDAY said grimly, sending the pieces of the Iron Man and Iron Maiden armors that had their own repulsors. The pieces seemed ridiculously small as they flew through the air to the smoking ship and Tony wondered if it would actually work.

"Everyone to the cargo hold," Tony instructed over the PA system. "Code DEAR: Drop Everything
And Run. Alert FRIDAY if you are stuck and need assistance. This is a Code DEAR. I repeat, this is a Code DEAR."

"Strap yourself in. Brace for impact," Kristoff agreed with the orders, turning off the PA.

"Connected to the ship," FRIDAY informed him as the screen lit up with the image of a pale-faced pilot who glanced wildly at Tony and Kristoff. He was surprisingly young, with blonde hair and blue eyes. According to the transmission, the ship was called the *Tantive II*.

"We slowed down your descent," Tony told him. "It might be enough to let your crew survive with some broken bones. Tell your people to brace themselves." The man didn't move. "Friday? Can he understand me?"

"Translating to High Galat-"

"I-I understand," the pilot interrupted, tight-faced. Though his words were softly and politely spoken, the sweat on his face and his wide eyes belied his false calm.

As he did, though, the ship suddenly increased in velocity. "What happened?" Kristoff demanded as the pilot missed the button he was aiming for, instead blasting some love song out of his speakers.

"Friday?" Tony asked again. He saw dozens of orbs leaving the ship and accelerating towards the ground.

"I have calculated the speed of *Tantive II*. It is sufficiently decelerated. The next order would be to clear the landing site." Right. Clearing out a landing space. Tony looked down. With Extremis, he could somehow make out a few of the repulsors slamming into civilians in the middle a wide bridge in the trajectory of the falling ship. The people were unceremoniously tossed out to either ends of the bridge with force. That was going to leave a bruise. More than a bruise, actually. Tony wouldn't be surprised to find people trying to sue him for broken bones, after this.

"Eighty-eight percent chance of Momray Bridge collapsing onto Descri Bridge and sixty-two percent chance of Descri Bridge collapsing onto Neithan Bridge. Should I divert the repulsors back to *Tantive II* to lessen the impact or move the civilians on Descri and Neithan?" FRIDAY asked.

Tony noted the cameras - everyone was in the cargo bay. "Move the people on Descri," Tony ordered, nodding to Kristoff. The repulsors dove to the bridge directly under Momray, once again shunting people to a safe distance.

"I hope everyone's in the bay," Kristoff said grimly. He glanced over at Tony as the 'Falcon spiralled down, below the *Tantive II*. "You should go to the bay."

Tony met his gaze squarely. "I'm staying." Kristoff's eyes widened, then he gave a sharp nod and turned his eyes back to the front.

Gritting his teeth, Kristoff swung the 'Falcon under the yacht and rammed it up, making an imprint of the 'Falcon on the bottom of *Tantive II*. It only deepened as the 'Falcon's thrusters tried, unsuccessfully, to stop the descent. The thrusters were at full blast but only barely slowed the fall.

Calculating the quickly-approaching bridge, Tony instructed Kristoff, "Get out from under it on my count."

"Sir?" Kristoff asked, glancing at the battered yacht that filled his vision, self-preservation and obedience warring with self-sacrifice and a sense of duty.
"We did all we could. If we stay, then we'll get crushed too, our weight adding to the stress on the bridge and-" Tony cut himself off, knowing that the Avengers were never interested in the technicalities. Kristoff glanced over at the abrupt end, giving him a nod. His muscles were tensed in preparation. "Now," Tony ordered.

Kristoff's hands flew to different levers and buttons. He coaxed the *Falcon* through a sloppy barrel roll out from under the doomed *Tantive II*.

Tony flinched as the yacht fell past the *Millennium Falcon*, crashing into the top bridge. Cracks formed all along it and, as FRIDAY predicted, the bridge gave out and fell in pieces to the one underneath it. Thankfully, Descri stood firm, the people on the bridge under it safe and sound.

-You want my property? You can't have it. But I did you a big favor-

Tony walked around the rubble, avoiding the emergency forces as he followed FRIDAY's instructions and nudged a large, durasteel beam. A repulsor lay on the ground. Once freed, it gave a weak hum and rose up, hovering unsteadily in the air before deactivating. Tony caught it in one hand and handed it to Senn. The Aleena grabbed it and scurried off.

"How many more of these do you have left to retrieve?" Suffee griped with a groan, clutching his back.

"Almost a hundred," Tony answered before freezing and turning back. "Wait, shouldn't you be in the Med bay?"

"There's people who need it more than I do. I'll be fine," Suffee brushed off.

Tony couldn't refute that without being a hypocrite, so he nodded. Most of the repulsors had still been connected to the underside of the yacht when it crashed, doing their duty to save as many lives at they could. They were now buried under the ship and pieces of the bridge. If he wanted to keep his tech in his hands, Tony needed all of the help he could get. He kicked a piece of steel away, revealing about a dozen of the repulsor-orbs all huddled together. They looked to be more or less undamaged. "How many of these do you think you can carry?"

In response, FRIDAY huffed and made them all fly towards the ship in a small, metal swarm. As they passed overhead, several of the rescue workers and gossiping civilians pointed at them and shouted. Suffee shook his head, turning away. "Those things aren't alive. Just make some more tomorrow or something." He paused, hand automatically falling on his earpiece, the crew's strongest connection to FRIDAY. "They aren't alive, are they?"

"No, but I'm not letting my tech fall into someone else's hands," Tony said to Suffee's back.

"What are we going to do?" Suffee asked. "The 'Falcon is barely functional. Kristoff doesn't think we can survive a trip through the hyperlanes."

"Honestly? With the damages to the front mandibles and hull, we'd be lucky to make it out of the atmosphere."

"Making it out of the atmosphere isn't the problem. It's keeping the oxygen that we would have to worry about," FRIDAY concurred.

"If it was just me, I'd patch up the 'Falcon, make it to the next system, then buy some supplies to finish the job, but I'm not risking it with you guys on board. We'll probably have to buy a new ship. I'll just melt down all of the vibranium and sell it. It should get us a fair price," Tony thought aloud, absentmindedly using the earthen term for that element.
It was a credit to how much time he had spent with Tony that Suffee didn't even need to ask what vibranium was. The Rodian still frowned, though. "If you need help paying for it, I have a few thousand credits saved up and I'm willing to set aside my pay for the next couple months. I'm sure the rest of the crew would, too."

"Don't worry, this isn't on you guys. This won't affect your pay. I promise. I'll pay for everything," Tony rushed to assure his second. It was a pattern that he was used to - someone from his team would offer to buy something, then the rest of them would look at him expectationally. Since he was the richest, he would need to pay for it. It was only fair.

He received a raised eyebrow for his troubles. "Unless you exploded the ship yourself for amusement, I hardly see how this is 'on' you," Suffee said. "Besides, I know that you personally have less than Shoragg saved up."

"And it's my fault. I know, I know! I'll sell all my stuff and fix it," Tony hastened to tell Suffee, fearing that the crew would leave if he couldn't make things better. He knew that money couldn't buy everything and that he wasn't the easiest person to work under, but he was working on it.

"There! He's there!" a hoarse voice said. Thinking that it was just a family reuniting, Tony didn't pay attention until someone grabbed his wrist and yanked.

"Hey!" Tony protested, wrenching his hand away. He spun around to see fair hair and watery, blue eyes. "Oh, you," he said, recognizing the pilot he saw on the transmission. His face was bashed up, the nose purple and bleeding. "Did you see someone for your face? I'm pretty sure it isn't supposed to look like that."

"That's the man," the pilot babbled to the somewhat-important looking man next to him and the younger, slightly less-important one behind him. Honestly, They probably would look a lot more important if they weren't so dusty and their clothes weren't torn. "That's the man who saved us."

There was a click of cameras and Tony peered at the reporters behind the three, only now noticing them.

-You want my property? You can't have it. But I did you a big favor-

After a quick round of photos with the three, Tony managed to hustle them all into the cargo hold of the 'Falcon, away from nosy eyes. "Thank you for saving us," the obvious leader of the three said. "I am Prestor Organa, Viceroy of Alderaan. This is my son, Bail Organa." He waved a hand to the tanned man next to him.

"Wow, hear that, kids? We saved a Viceroy!" Tony told his crew, grinning. Gis grunted, Hoviv eyed the non-kingly man with suspicion, and FRIDAY remained silent. Tony looked over at the other kids, but none of them had anything to say. "Well, this is my ward, Gis."

"Gis'tik Kal Tos," Gis corrected lowly.

"And Friday's watching from here!" Tony gestured at the FRIDAY-orb. "She helped with a lot of the technical stuff, like the repulsors and contacting your ship." He assumed that 'Friday' would be an okay name. The days of a week were different here, so people wouldn't automatically ask 'Like the day?' whenever he introduced FRIDAY.

"Hello, sirs. It's a pleasure to meet you," FRIDAY greeted. "I fully approve of your handling of the refugees."

"Interesting. Is this a camera of some sort?" Bail asked curiously, leaning forward to look into the
lens. FRIDAY directed it back. "It's so small, yet seems fully mobile! Oh! I- Thank you! I tried my best with it. It was a sticky situation."

"Pretty much a camera," Hoviv said belatedly with a shrug. The Rodian and the Alderaanian looked at each other for a second, but the man in his early twenties apparently didn't see the teenaged Rodian as a viable conversation partner.

"So are we going to meet her?" Bail asked with a bright smile towards the orb. "I would very much like to see you in person, Miss Friday," he said with a light blush.

Tony blinked, rewinding his words to see where he implied that FRIDAY was a human. "I'm fine with this," FRIDAY said crossly, switching to a slightly younger-sounding speech pattern. "The orb is basically me, anyways."

Bail frowned, obviously confused, before following FRIDAY's lead and doing away with all the formality. "How old are you? And it doesn't matter how you look, you know. In Alderaan, we practice peace and tolerance to all beings."

"I am three years old," FRIDAY said gleefully.

Laughing lightly, Bail shook his head. "You don't have to be shy. Come on, how old are you, really?" Bail coaxed. "I'm twenty-three."

Tony turned his back on the disturbing conversation. "Anyways," he said loudly, directing the older Organa to another one of his crew members, "This is Kristoff. He's the amazing pilot of my ship. He did just as much as I did, probably even more."

"Don't listen to him. He did ten times as much as I did," Kristoff told Prestor, slapping a hand over Tony's mouth when the shorter man opened it to refute his statement. At the Viceroy's chuckle, Kristoff raised his other hand to give Prestor a firm shake. "Pleased to meet you, sir! I admire your work with the Delaya trade agreements." Tony knew as a fact that Kristoff stayed far from the Core Worlds and paid no attention to anything as little as trade agreements.

"You know of the agreements?" Prestor asked, sounding pleased.

"Of course!" Kristoff exclaimed. "Facilitating trade between the only two inhabitable planets of the Alderaan system is a huge factor in the lowered tax re..." Kristoff and Prestor traded facts about the implications of linking the two sister planets. When Tony raised an eyebrow at Kristoff, the ex-smuggler gave a minute shrug of his right shoulder, coupled with a quick flick of his head to the right, an emerging habit on the ship to indicate that it was FRIDAY whispering in their ears, feeding them information and suggestions.

Tony stepped backwards, not wanting to get caught in meaningless schmoozing. Kristoff had that all handled. The rest of the crew, not interested in mingling with the upper echelon of society, had already melted away. He accidently caught the eye of the pilot as he stepped out of the 'Falcon. The boy was younger than he had looked through the transmission. He was just a kid, really. The kid looked at his superiors, then snuck to follow Tony. "Hi," the kid finally said.

"Hi," Tony said after a moment.

There was an awkward silence before the kid blurted out, "Thanks for saving me. I really didn't want to die."

"Who are you?" Tony asked.
"Colton, my name's Colton," the kid said quickly. "It's my… well, it was my first interplanetary flight. It would be horrible if I killed the Viceroy! I'm really, really glad you were there. I don't know what I'd do if you weren't there. No, wait, that's wrong. I'd be dead. So I guess I know what I'd be doing if you weren't there? I mean. Thanks," the kid looked bashfully down.

Eyeing the kid, Tony said, "Yeah, don't mention it. About my ship..."

"Oh! Yes! Viceroy Prestor said your ship's destroyed-"

"Yeah, it is." Tony agreed. "So, do you know any medics?"

"-so he's buying you a new one!"

"Wait, what?" If Tony had been drinking something, he would've done a spit take right then and there. Usually, it was him doing the outlandish favors for someone else's act of good faith. Tony didn't know how to feel about this. He didn't like being helpless and he hated being in someone's debt.

"Well, it's our fault so we have to fix it!" Well, that was one way of putting it. Tony was no stranger to atoning for his mistakes.

Was it bad that the kid reminded him of Peter? Tony looked at the earnest eyes. "Right…. How old did you say you were again?"

"-You want my property? You can't have it. But I did you a big favor-

Just four hours left before the meeting.

Tony was in front of another camera, completely ignoring the Republic's equivalent of emails sent by Bunkurd Corp. They were all but demanding his silence and telling him that he needed to confer with them first, before making any statements. Tough luck, seeing that Tony hadn't signed anything yet. He couldn't help it if Bunkurd's transmission were swallowed up in a verifiable barrage of transmissions from several other companies.

"Haven't thought of a name for them yet," Tony admitted to the interviewer. She was a pretty Corusanti reporter, new and nowhere near the likes of the sharks back home.

"And are they for sale?" the interviewer asked.

"Oh, yes. For government use only, of course," Tony said.

"Please explain," she asked.

"The government rents them from me and I'll station them at every major shipyard of their choosing. I'll maintain them and control their flight patterns in case of emergencies. The government will be the ones who actually activates them."

The reporter peered at the screen behind the camera for her next question. Tony finished reading it before she even opened her mouth to ask the question aloud, quickly forming his answer. "So are you deliberately withholding life-saving devices from the public?"

"I would hardly call it 'withholding,'" Tony brushed off. "It took several thousand repulsors to slow down - slow down, not carry - a small yacht, and each one costs thousands of credits to produce. Who in their right minds would even try to buy them? Renting them is a better option for the government. Plus, I'd be the one maintaining and updating them. It can save lives, which is why the
governments will get reduced prices." Okay, he might have been exaggerating the numbers, but the point was still there.

"And there you have it," the reporter finished, voice steady even as her cheeks reddened. "Anthony Stark, owner of Stark Industries!"

-You want my property? You can't have it. But I did you a big favor-

FRIDAY's cameras whirred silently as they turned to track Suffee's path down the hall. The Rodian had undergone a drastic change in habits, including sleeplessness and loss of appetite, along with a worrying weariness. As Suffee stopped again to wipe the sweat off his forehead, FRIDAY decided to butt in. "Are you alright, sir?"

Suffee looked at the closest camera and FRIDAY automatically blinked the green light on the side of it once before remembering that Suffee wasn't Tony, Pepper, or Rhodes and simply wouldn't understand. "Natural part of the Rodian life cycle, I'm afraid," Suffee said with a frown.

"Would you like a scan for confirmation?" FRIDAY pressed. The scanners on the inside of the ship were only strong enough to detect presences. Though they could also detect shielded intruders, they simply weren't medical scanners.

Suffee did not answer, hugging his shoulders in a rare display of vulnerability.

FRIDAY's suspicions grew exponentially. "Throughout the last six months, you have displayed such traits several times, though rarely with such extremes. I am unable to find such data in public archives. Unless it is a cultural secret, I must insist you undertake an exam," FRIDAY urged.

"It depends," Suffee said quietly. "Can you keep a secret?"

"The data will not be shared," FRIDAY promised. If it was what she suspected, it wouldn't stay a secret for much longer, anyway.

-You want my property? You can't have it. But I did you a big favor-

It didn't need to be said that Tony missed his meeting with Bunkurd Corp. Officially, he was in a meeting with some senator or the other. Unofficially...

"S***, how many are there?!" Tony hissed in horror to Gis. The two of them were decked in Earth-style sunglasses and caps that Tony made, indiscreetly crouching near the edge of a ramp. Passersby glanced at them in confusion as they walked past. Neither Tony nor Gis took notice. They were busy watching Jedi file into and out of the building - the Jedi Temple, home of the Jedi Order. It was a lot more than the two dozen Jedi he was expecting. There had to be hundreds in this building alone.

"That many," Gis agreed, picking at his hat.

"Archives suggest there are ten thousand Jedi," FRIDAY informed him. "You know, you didn't have to walk all the way here. I could've told you that if you just asked." The bottom-right corner of his sunglasses, a pouting icon popped up.

Tony was glad he was practically sitting as he suddenly became woozy. "Ten thousand? Right here?" He imagined ten thousand Steve Rogers, rampaging across the planets to save their very own Buckys, leaving behind a trail of broken bridges that held a strange resemblance to Momray bridge.
"Uh. No," FRIDAY said snootily, perfectly imitating one of the air-headed supermodels Tony 'met' nearly a whole decade ago. "They're spread out across the galaxy."

Was that better or worse? Tony thought of ten thousand Wandas spread out throughout the universe and ready to pop up without a moment's notice, twisting minds and influencing the thought process of people they didn't particularly like, causing Ultrons to be born. He shuddered. Worse. Definitely worse.

"Boss? Dad? Daddy-O?"

"I'm fine, Fri," Tony said automatically. He turned as he caught a slight shift in the shade of Gis's sunglasses. Was Friday messaging Gis?

Gis glared as he caught Tony looking, scratching his hat harder. His talon caught against the canvas-like cloth, tearing it. Gis scowled, snatched it off his head, and began tearing the cloth covering to pieces, revealing the slim twin blasters Tony had incorporated into the hat.

Seeing his invention about to be outed right there in the middle of the street, probably a crime in this well-off area of Coruscant, Tony immediately reacted. "Hey, no!" Tony protested, making a grab for it. Gis dodged his lunge and began fleeing. Tony gave chase, the Jedi momentarily forgotten.

-You want my property? You can't have it. But I did you a big favor-

#RememberTantiveII #StandTallDescri

Tony Stark? As in TonyStark, maker of StarkWeb?

-TwoMoonsOneWorld

#RememberTantiveII #StandTallDescri #WhoWereThey

One way to find out. RodianPower is part TonyStark's crew.

RodianPower Hey were you on this ship?

[image1 jpg.]

-JJOP

#RememberTantiveII #StandTallDescri

@JJOP Yep. Got better pics. See my page for more.

[image932 jpg.]

-RodianPower

#HeyImnewhereDidIdothe#thingrightSomeonehelpmePlease
Hey, I'm new here! Did I do the # thing right? Someone help me. Please?

-User:WellMyNameIsColton?DoIUseMyLastName/?Password:477034341

#ThatColtonDude

Did anyone see that Colton dude's post? ...Is that his actual password?

-LdernWithNoA

#ThatColtonDude

@LdernWithNoA Someone should tell him we all know his password now.

-HelpMeSoar

#ThatColtonDude #TonyStarkMeme

I'm on it. Don't worry. Tony's going to be upset tho. He wanted to be the first meme. Someone make Tony Stark a good meme and I'll ensure that you meet him.

-HisGirlFRIDAY

Chapter End Notes

Hey, so I used the word 'dove' for past tense of dive… Is it supposed to be dived? Also, can someone explain to me the concept of 'spaceport'? Like, how far does it actually teleport? And is it with the hyperdrive technology?

This is where I'd beg for reviews, except for the fact that I'm too proud to ask for them. Yes, I can and will reply to every single one of my commenters in a PM, no matter how short they are, because I care about each and every single one of you on some vague level, somewhere deep, deep inside this black hole I call a heart, though you probably only care about the chapters I can churn out. Probably.
Chapter Summary

4/1/2018 Note: Temporarily changed the summary and title for April Fools.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the confusion last chapter. Apparently, something in this twisted thing I call a brain mixed up spacePORT and telePORT. Whoops. Okay. Glad I have you readers to clarify for me. Think that I can have Tony make some sort of teleportation device with the Hyperdrive tech. or is that too magic-y for the SW universe?

I'm pretty sure someone on Fanfiction is trolling me. Every time I post a new chapter, the number of favorites always goes down before it goes up. Either that or readers really have a love-hate relationship with my work.

Anyways, extra-early update because it was someone's birthday yesterday. Was going to update yesterday, but my Fanfiction account got all locked up. Seriously, it was fixed late evening, so I ended up with less than a quarter of the views I normally get. Never noticed how much that actually made an impact, how I depend on seeing that little bar graph thingy for happiness. Wish AO3 had that, but I should start weaning myself off of checking it every hour. Anyways, happy birthday, Ants, Soysauce. He would like to say that he's the coolest person I've ever met.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was the last day they were allowed to be on what Tony dubbed to forever be called ‘Croissant.’ Technically, he could apply for some more time. With his new fame and reputation, they wouldn’t deny him. He just… didn’t want to. Something about the planet just screamed wrong to him. It made him want to get away, to get out. With all the willpower of staying awake during board meetings, he pushed those instincts away. It was probably nothing. After all, none of his crew seemed to feel the same, not even FRIDAY. It was probably all in his head.

The Organa family had insisted on paying for their new ship. Tony, uncomfortable with using their money, promised to pay back their credits, insisting that it was a loan. Now, they had a sleek starship that was built for speed and maneuverability, with decent enough space inside. Tony, not in the mood for theatrics, just dubbed it the ‘Y Not’ and called it a done deal.

Senn and his whole family clan, the ones on the ship, at least, were trying to visit a relative named Kazdan Paratus. Kazdan had apparently been taken to Croissant last year. The Aleena-kid would be two this year. Suffee and Galee disappeared somewhere in the endless crowds, Kristoff had taken off to a smuggler’s’ den somewhere in the undercity, and Quinton and Bai-Gon had turned most of the crew into a rag-tag tourist group.

FRIDAY was in an expanded version of the FRIDAY-Orb, bigger and with an exponential amount of functions. For their last day, Tony, Gis, and FRIDAY were spending ‘family time’ together.
That mainly consisted of Gis and Tony trying many different, way-too-expensive dishes while FRIDAY recounted their history and impacts on the body, FRIDAY insisting she wanted to see something-or-the other and dragging the other two with her, and Tony and FRIDAY tailing Gis as he wandered the slums in the undercity, making sure the kid didn’t get into any trouble. All-in-all, it was a pretty fun day.

Then one of them - Tony was firmly of the idea that it was Gis’s fault - decided that ‘infiltrating’ the Jedi Temple would be a fine way to end the afternoon. FRIDAY concurred, pointing out the fact that the Jedi had a ‘public’ sector where civilians could wander around in. That was how Gis and Tony ended up in their Tony-made tourist disguises. He even had a miniature hat for the FRIDAY-orb. It was just a disguise that doubled as decoration. Nope, certainly no automatic blasters folded into the sides.

Studiously ignoring the fact that FRIDAY had somehow concentrated her blaster into a single, steady laser beam and was slowly cutting through the plexiglass that protected ‘LIGHTSABER of Satele Shan,’ Gis both encouraging her and drawing attention away from the Very Suspicious Floating Orb, Tony took several image captures of the displayed lightsabers. He tried to scan them to find what was inside, but the plexiglass deflected most of the waves, the rest absorbed by the very metal that made up the saber.

Reaching the dead end of that particular hall, Tony began backtracking. He looked around to see if he missed anything, only to spot an opening that hadn’t been evident when walking from the front of the hall to the back. He curiously eyed the partitioned-off corridor that branched off from the main one.

“Want to know,” Gis’s voice came from right behind him.

Tony ruthlessly quashed the urge to to yelp and do a spinning jump to face his ward. He hadn’t known that the Saurin had snuck up on him. “You know that’s not allowed,” Tony said without any bite.

“When that stop us?” Gis said blankly.

“I second that!” FRIDAY’s voice came out on speaker. Tony looked over to see that part of the VSFO had been disassembled and loosely placed back on top, a… thing… sticking out from where Gis and FRIDAY had squeezed it between gears and wires.

A message flashed on the inside of his sunglasses. [You don’t want to know.]

“Plausible deniability, right. You guys know me so well. Despite the fact that you’re both my wards and that I’d be in trouble anyways, if you’re caught,” Tony said, smirking. With a quick glance to make sure the coast was clear, Tony unhooked the ribbon and they slipped in.

There was nothing fascinating about the hallway inside. There were boxes upon boxes, piled high up on the shelves, reaching up towards a high ceiling. Tony opened one and peered inside, only to see... junk. Gis reached over, grabbed a foam that had the consistency of jello, and squeezed. It sprung back with a happy wave.

Grimacing, Tony looked away, opening the next box. It simply had common household items. “Fascinating,” Tony deadpanned.

“What do you think you’re doing?” a young voice demanded.

Tony looked behind him. No one. He looked down. There was a little kid with his hands on his
hips scowling up at him. He was dressed in miniature Jedi clothes. “Aw…” Tony said, patting the kid on his head. “That’s kinda cute…”

“I’m not cute! I’m a Jedi. We are respectable, not cute!” The kid slapped his hand away with more force than necessary. “Are you spying on us?” he accused them. To be fair, they were in a corridor that was probably sectioned off for a reason.

“What makes you think that?” Tony asked.

Unfortunately for him, the same moment he said that, Gis opened his mouth and answered, “Yes.” When the kid’s eyes widened in shock, Gis pointed at Tony and said, “Tony idea.”

“Spies! Are you Sith?” The kid fumbled at his belt, withdrawing a silvery cylinder that sort of looked like a miniature thermos.

“Sith?” Tony couldn’t resist asking.

“Dark Force users!” He held the thermos at them threateningly.

“Dark?” Gis repeated with a frown. He pointed at Tony again. “Tony likes dark. Always dress in dark clothes!”

“Sith!” the Jedi-kid yelled. He turned on the cylinder to reveal a bright blue light, shaped into a beam. Oh, right… Tony had forgotten all about those. It was one of the lightsaber things. Tony had kind of been thrown off by the scaled-down size, the much more modern look (the ones on display must be ancient), and the fact that it was a kid holding the very dangerous weapon.

Gis eyed the overpowered stick with awe and childish glee, then turned to Tony, his snout stretched into a wide grin.

“Grounded. For life,” Tony said crossly.

“Obi-Wan!” an older man scolded, turning the corner and walking briskly towards them. He gave Tony and Gis a polite smile. “I’m sorry. He can be a little impulsive.”

“Master,” the kid - Obi-Wan - said automatically, turning his lightsaber off and straightening into a slightly militaristic pose. “Wait, no! Master, these are Sith!”

“Hey, you can’t just go around making accusations like that!” Tony said, indignant. “All you know is that I’m not a Jedi and that I like wearing black sometimes!”

“Wearing the color of darkness. A clear sign of the Sith,” the Jedi Master said drolly. Tony nearly snorted in surprise. He didn’t think Jedi with a sense of humor existed.

“You and I are going to be friends,” Tony said seriously.

The Jedi Master lifted an eyebrow. “Indeed?”

Tony gave a nod. “Yep, we will stroll around the Temple on our off days and troll the rest of the Jedi. Strolling and trolling.”

“Troll?”

“Do random stuff and prod them for a reaction.”

“Intriguing. I would very much like to join you on that excursion.”
“Master, you can’t do that!” Obi-Wan protested, tugging adorably at the Jedi Master’s sleeve. “They aren’t allowed to be here!”

“We can make an exception. I’m sure they have a good reason for being here.” With that, ‘Master’ turned and gave Tony a stern look that was offset by the mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

“We got curious. If you really didn’t want us here, you guys would’ve put locked doors, just like in the main hall,” Tony brushed off.

“I see,” ‘Master’ said, giving a sage nod. “A fair defense.”

“Master!” Obi-Wan said, scandalized.

Tony’s StarkPhone chirped cheerfully. Tony pulled it out and checked the message. “Well, gotta go! It was nice meeting you, but you know how it is. Things to do, people to meet, ships to save…” Tony gave a snappy salute and walked for the exit, snagging Gis’s arm as he walked past. Gis began trailing after him, not letting go of the whatever-it-was he had in his hand. Tony could feel the Jedi pair’s eyes on them, but they didn’t try to stop Gis, so he figured it was okay.

“Master, we have to get their names! What if they try to come back?” Obi-Wan immediately began protesting.

“I’m surprised you don’t know who he is,” the older Jedi’s voice floated after them. “He was on the news quite recently. Don’t you remember?”

“What did he do, try to steal from a senator?”

“Famous, not infamous.”

“So is he a senator, then?”

Tony let out a bark of laugh as the conversation faded away due to the distance. Once they were outside, the hazy light of day hitting their face, Tony began jogging, calling out over his shoulder, “Come on, kiddos! First one to the ship gets to choose the next mission!” Gis let out a whoop and began sprinting away, uncaring of the attention they were attracting. “Wrong way, you little maniac,” Tony yelled after him.

“I take shortcut. Come in first!” Gis declared loudly, not looking back.

“Not likely,” FRIDAY scoffed. The repulsor tech that kept the orb aloft hummed audibly. The VSFO hung in the air for a moment, then blasted off in a nearly vertical direction.

“Hey, no fair!” Tony laughed, swinging around a corner and discreetly using Extremis to pump his legs faster.

-Sometimes you gotta run before you can walk-

#TonyStarkMeme

Here’s a montage of How Tony Looks Awesome No Matter What

[image954 jpg.]

[image1894 jpg.]

[image1324 jpg.]
ColtonJustColtonMyPasswordIsNot477034341

#TonyStarkMeme

Well, last night at about 3, Tony forgot that he crashed the ship, tracked its location to the junkyard, and was shocked to find it wrecked? He woke my family by calling them and screaming incoherently. I already know Tony Stark, but if I win, can I just have a million credits instead?

-RodianPower

#TonyStarkMeme

Here’s why we love Tony Stark

[Open Document Here]

-TheySnore

#ThatColtonDude

That Colton guy really makes my day.

-SweetStuff

#TonyStarkMeme #ThatColtonDude

Those aren’t memes.

I have placed a tracker on Colton's account. Anyone not within three cities of Colton using it will automatically be recorded and receive a lifetime ban from StarkNet. As will their immediate relatives and descendants.

-HisGirlFRIDAY

-Sometimes you gotta run before you can walk-

FRIDAY got back to the Y Not first. Of course she did. She didn’t have to obey the traffic laws like they did, and her connection to the ship meant that she knew exactly where it was. Of course, that didn’t mean she was able to choose the next bounty - Suffee had already picked one out. Tony guessed that the Rodian deserved it after all the times he nearly died.

It was an open-and-shut type of case, straightforward and with a fair price. Two rival planets that shared the same star had gotten into yet another fight. The Minister of one of the planets had asked them to retrieve his daughter, who was taken by the rival government. She didn’t do anything, and involving a normal, innocent kid in a political-fight-turned-physical was a kriff move. Tony wasn’t
sure if he used the K-word correctly, but whatever.

It was supposed to be simple.

A bright red blaster bolt shattered the darkness, casting a red light on their surroundings as they flew towards them. It had bad aim, flying too low for a fatal hit. That didn’t mean that Tony didn’t have to try to keep his friends safe. Still, Tony was too slow to knock Greer out of the way, and the near-human let out a muffled yelp as it hit his leg and he crumpled to the ground.

“Go, go, go!” Tony barked hushedly, internally wincing at how harsh the word sounded in Basic. In English, it had a more rounded sound. However, it didn’t seem to matter to the crew. Knowing that they were discovered would do something like that. They burst out from the bushes and doorways and ran in the general direction of the ship, tackling the guards as they went.

Hefting a tense but silent Greer over his shoulders, Tony followed, pausing as he realized one of his crew was left behind. He locked eyes with Kovlo, who jerked his head in a shake. Realizing the Rodian was laying down cover fire and trusting that he could make it back on his own, Tony continued on. “Quinton, Bai-Gon, Kovlo is covering us. Make sure he gets back safely. Retreat with him to point two”

“Yep, got’cha,” one of them said.

There was a muffled conversation and a yelp before the other said in a more formal tone, “Yes, sir!”

Refusing to hesitate or look back, Tony pressed on, eyes alert for any hidden officers. Tony had specifically chosen the cousins for their talents. Statistically, they had the highest chance of survival. With their dark hair and eyes, yet freckled caucasian features, they fit in seamlessly with the rest of Yandr’s population. With their familiarity with each other, they should be able to come up with a story on the spot if they were spotted.

That thought didn’t help.

With Kovlo drawing the main forces away and the cousins discreetly running interference, the rest of the extraction team had a clear path to the ship. Ahead of him he could see Gis holding his left arm out, Borr and his cousin leaping off of a rooftop and landing safely on his arm before scrambling onto Gis’s shoulder. Tony made a note to talk to Gis about leaving the ship without permission.

“Actually, boss, I told him that Borr and Norr were finished scouting and asked him to retrieve them…” FRIDAY told him, evidently following his gaze.

“Group of guards heading down West Street,” Suffee bit out. “Gis, I think they saw you.” Tony could’ve told them that from the raised shouts that erupted. Gis grunted an affirmative.

“Keep going. I got this. Suff’ you alright?”

“Fine,” Suffee said in a way that told Tony that he was very much not fine. It didn’t make sense. Tony had benched Suffee due to poor health. The Rodian was supposed to be in the ship. There was no reason for him to be hurt.

Just several meters in front of him, the group of guards Suffee had warned them about rushed to the crosswalk and turned, chasing after Gis. They shouted in indistinct Y’rian into their comms. Tony picked up a young, fallen tree and threw it at the back of their legs, reinforcing the throw with Extremis. The branches did their work, tangling with the moving limbs and taking down the
row. Like dominoes, the guards knocked each other down as they fell.

As they pulled apart from each other, one of the Yandrians spied him and pointed him out to his comrades. Unable to resist the urge to try out some of the Y’rian he picked up in the six hours they were there, Tony shouted out some things that probably translated to ‘chew these shoes,’ and ‘my girlfriend’s hotter than yours’ in the crudest way possible before jogging away. Seeing that they weren’t following him, he pulled out a can of spray paint and approached a clean wall as threateningly as he could. The Yandrians, condoners of order and uniformity they were, took notice right away, abandoning their chase after Gis’s fleeting figure to swarm the more immediate threat - Tony about to spray bright red graffiti on their white wall.

Tony took off down the street opposite from the one the guards came from, laughing loudly the whole time. These guys were easier to wind up than Rogers!

“The princess is in the house!” Kristoff proclaimed. “Well, in the safe house, at least. When will the ship swing around? An hour? Two?” Tony heard a thump, followed by a high-pitched wail. Tony didn’t understand. The kid was supposed to be eight or something!

“You didn’t-?”

He could almost feel Kristoff’s eye-roll. “I didn’t drop her on the floor. I’m not a savage. I just tossed her across the room, onto the couch.”

“Like that’s much better,” Greer said. Tony started. He hadn’t known the near-human was awake. “I can walk now,” he told Tony.

“Six hours,” Suffee told Kristoff.

“Yeah, no,” Tony said, not needing to even think about it. “You had a high-power blaster bolt to your leg. You aren’t walking for another day, at least.”

“Your shielding worked!” Gree protested.

“I can still smell something burning. It’s your leg, by the way,” Tony deadpanned.

“But.”

“Two days,” Tony threatened. Greer fell silent. “That’s what I thought,” Tony said, smirking widely. Why couldn’t he? There was no one to see the rare, unhidden glee. The blinking dots on his sunglasses indicated that everyone else had fallen into their safe positions. All that was left on the list was to lay low, wait out the guards, then slip past the defenses.

With that in mind, Tony mentally rerouted Extremis into his legs, springing forward and leaving the guards in the dust. Several more twists and turns later, he ducked into an abandoned building scouted out earlier, climbing to the top and setting Greer down. “Let’s have a look,” Tony mumbled, setting his glasses to night vision and pulling out a bacta patch. Greer grimaced and pulled his pants-leg up, revealing…

“Huh,” Tony said, mildly impressed with himself. He poked at the pinkened skin. “Okay, I guess you can walk, then.” That burning smell must be the pants, then.

“I told you so,” Greer said.

“For that, I’m detaining you in the med bay for six hours anyways.” Tony looked up. “Twelve,” he corrected himself as Greer opened his mouth to argue. Greer snapped his mouth shut with an
audible clack of his teeth.

Tony split open their ration bars as Greer shuffled a deck of cards, moving to a brighter section of the warehouse. They laughed and talked, the guards searching for them in the street providing a brief form of entertainment. The sun dipped fully behind the buildings in the distance and Greer took a nap while Tony settled down for first watch.

-Sometimes you gotta run before you can walk-

Just two hours into his watch, the earpiece crackled. “Stark? Guys?” came Kristoff’s worried voice. “I thought you said six hours?”

“Hmmm?” Suffee hummed as Tony shook the cobwebs from his head.

“What,” stated Kovlo in an irritable voice.

Greer shifted and murmured. Tony glanced over and turned off the other man’s earpiece before quietly answering Kristoff, “Yeah. Six hours, Kristy. Leaving at the stroke of midnight, like all the fairytales.” He wasn’t sure if Republic fairytales had that detail, but it was a wide galaxy. Statistically, someone had to have used the ‘at the stroke of midnight’ phrase.

“So if you three are still at the safepoints, then who’s at the door?” Kristoff asked crossly.

Tony was instantly alert. “What do you mean, who’s at the door?” he asked, hoping he was wrong.

“Gee, I don’t know, maybe that someone’s at the door, trying to get in?!” Kristoff asked incredulously. Tony usually liked being right, but this time he hated it.

Shoving Greer, then moving to collect their stuff, Tony snapped, “Get up, get up, get up, get-”

“I’m up!” Greer all but shouted, sitting bolt upright.

Tony yanked the blanket off of him and folded it sloppily. “Friday will explain on the way. Right now, we need to get to Kristoff!”

Obviously confused but trusting him, Greer was on his feet in seconds, grabbing the blanket and shoving it into his pack. “Let’s go!” The two of them tore through the night streets. Having the safepoints far away from each other seemed like a good idea to be untraceable, but it was more of a hindrance, right now. After some mild panicking and fumbling on the other man’s part, Greer found out the reason FRIDAY was silent was because his earpiece was off. “What do you mean? That place is secure. We made sure of that!”

“Kristoff, report! Tony, why hasn’t Kristoff been answering?”

Suffee was right, Tony realized with dawning horror. After that last, alarming rhetorical question, the ex-smuggler had gone silent. “Friday, what’s wrong? Friday?”

“I don’t understand,” FRIDAY said, sounding puzzled. “The transmissions are going through. The earpiece is intact. Kristoff just isn’t answering.”

“Not good,” Gis said.

“Slow down!” Greer shouted to Tony.

“Gis, go to sleep!” Tony scolded.
“Can help.”
“Sleep!”

“Not my dad,” Gis grumbled.

“Gis—” Tony began.

“Boss… Gis already turned off his earpiece,” FRIDAY told him.

“Family drama later! We need a game plan!” one of the cousins, probably Bai-Gon, said.

“Right. Where are you guys?”

“Four blocks away.” Kovlo’s group.

“Two minutes.” Suffee.

“We’re there,” Tony said, sliding to a stop in front of the building. He turned to Greer to discuss their battle plan. “Well, I’m there,” Tony amended himself. He must have left Greer behind somewhere. “Suffee, stay on the ship. Be ready to follow if they exit the building. Everyone available, I’d appreciate it if you form a perimeter. Group two, when you get here, go back me up.” Tony didn’t wait for them to signal their approval of his plans, heading right into the building and darting up the stairs.

Once he reached the room they had agreed on using beforehand, Tony charged at the closed door. He twisted at the last second, putting all the force into his shoulder, ramming the door open. Sensing three people, Tony put himself between them, back facing the group of two.

“You know, you didn’t have to do that. It was unlocked,” Kristoff’s voice said from behind him. Tony couldn’t catch any inflection in the ex-smuggler’s words, but he couldn’t turn to check. His focus was on the unidentified man in front of him. FRIDAY blinked a little icon on his sunglasses to indicate she was still connected and that there was no jamming device. As agreed, they didn’t speak, Tony wary that there might be listening devices that he didn’t hear about, or that the man wasn’t quite human.

Still, no threatening moves.

As his battle readiness slowly winded down after recognizing a lower threat level, Tony’s awareness broadened. The stranger was sitting stiffly on the loveseat, spine stiff in a way that was half-way reminiscent of the Bucky Barnes’s Winter-Soldier-doesn’t-know-how-to-relax and half-way Wilson’s tense ready-to-grab-a-gun-and-fire. Kristoff’s earpiece and primary blaster lay discarded by his feet, alongside a slightly-glowy knife and a angular blaster. Kristoff himself was probably on the accompanying couch with the minister’s kid, judging from their reflection on the chrome counter.

Simply shooting the man was not an option. After all, the stranger hadn't made a threatening move yet, despite the fact that he was not supposed to be there. Tony didn't want to talk first, to put himself in the position of less power, but it was clear the other was comfortable sitting in silence for prolonged periods of time. It was clear Tony had to make the first move.

“Who are you?” Tony asked the stranger, unable to see his eyes due to the light and shadows the man had artfully hidden himself in. A play of light by the man’s side had Tony glancing to the stranger’s side, seeing a helmet clutched tightly in the man’s hand. Not just any helmet, though. Tony heard of it from rumors other bounty hunters sprouted, seen it on the HoloNet. It was a Mandalorian helmet.
“You are Tony Stark.” It was stated quietly with voice rough with disuse. It didn’t answer the question, though.

“What’s with people telling me my name?” Tony complained. “I already know what my name is!”

Text scrolled across his vision. [I have run identification scans on facial structure, body composition and stance, and armor. There is a 86.42% match with bounty hunter Jango Fett.]

Fett. Tony had heard that name before, usually along with ‘Mandalorian,’ ‘yeah, that guy,’ ‘probably the best of the best,’ and ‘that kriiffing son of a-!’ This wasn’t a man to make an enemy out of. The eighty-six percent match was a surprise, though. FRIDAY usually had a hit around the mid-to-upper nineties, especially since she should be unaffected by the strange shading. He’d like to ask Fett his secret, but he didn’t think the other bounty hunter would reveal it.

Tony and Fett gazed warily at each other. Normally, Tony would’ve jumped for a chance to befriend someone as (in)famous as Fett; connections like the more experienced bounty hunter had would be invaluable in their line of work. However, Tony was also experienced at picking out warriors. Fett didn't stand like Captain America or his frozen bestie, but the way he stood didn't resemble Clint or Natasha's either. It told of a mixture between Roger's focus, Natasha's cunning, and Clint's spontaneity.

...At least, that was what Tony thought. He could be wrong, though. He wasn't a excellent profiler like Agent Agent. He was better than Natasha, though, so that was something.

"Your armor," Fett said in a voice that was loud, yet hushed, breaking Tony out of his thoughts. "Not Mandalorian. Better. Where did you get it?"

Internally, Tony swelled with pride, though he outwardly expressed it with a frown. Mandalorian armor was probably one of the best around, and this more experienced bounty hunter admitted his was better. "I built it. Did you get yours from a Mandalorian?" Tony knew this type of negotiation well. Never give something without gaining something. Mandalorians didn't willingly part with their armor, made of the expensive material they were. They were also fearsome warriors. If Fett had defeated one and taken the armor... he was a bigger threat than Tony thought.

Seemingly reading his mind, Fett answered, "I earned it."

Tony considered it. ‘Earn’ could mean two different things. Fett could've meant he won it fairly in a fight or that he had taken it as a trophy, but... something about the way he intoned it made Tony think differently. Could the rumors about Fett being a Mandalorian be true? "It is astonishing what you could earn with a good bounty," he said agreeably.

“Not a bounty.” Still no inflection in his voice, though there was still a heavy frown on his face. It seemed like a defense, not a default expression, though. The fingers of his right hand clenched tightly. A nervous tick?

“If you say so, Fett,” Tony said, saying his name for the first time. The man shifted when Tony revealed his name, but Tony didn’t know enough to say if it was because of surprise or something else. “Why are you here?”

“My target.” Fett waved vaguely in Kristoff’s direction, the skin between his eyebrows creased. “Tough luck. We got her first.” Even as he said this, Tony tensed, ready for a fight. It wouldn’t do to be overconfident, but Tony knew that he could take on the other bounty hunter. Why was he here anyways? The bounty on the retrieval wasn't that high! Fett only took the most well-paid
bounties. This one was in the middle range, almost completely average!

He wasn’t expecting for Fett to dip his head in acquiescence, features loose. “I know. Good game. I will be seeing you around,” Fett said calmly, holding his hand out for a shake.

Why was everyone sure they would meet him again? First, that Jedi, now Fett. Tony wasn’t able to catch his surprise in time and before he could react, Fett was frowning again and withdrawing his hand. Instead he brought it back to his helmet, fingers white against the painted metal. The bounty hunter cautiously stepped backwards, away from Tony, bending his knees to scoop up his blaster and knife. He slipped out of the room, doing all this without breaking eye contact.

Tony turned to Kristoff. “What was that all about?” he demanded. “Friday, tell the crew to stand down. Fett is not a threat. I repeat, he is not a threat.”

“Fett? He got to meet Fett? ” he heard through the earpiece.

“Pretty sure he was just tracking us down to test out his skills, see what he did wrong and how he could improve,” Kristoff said, shrugging. “He could’ve killed me twice over, but didn’t, so I thought I’d take a leap of faith. Apparently, Fett’s never gotten his target snatched from right under his nose yet. Then again, he just started a couple years ago, so that’s not saying much.” Tony didn't think that was a viable reason to lead a team member into a possible trap and found himself questioning his teammate's loyalty. Truly, what did he know about Kristoff, other than the fact that he used to smuggle? In a mirror of Fett’s earlier movements, Kristoff bent and picked up his equipment before backing away to flop onto the couch, narrowly missing the little girl, who squeaked and scrambled away.

[I don't like this.] FRIDAY made her feelings clear. Her line of thoughts ran parallel to his. Tony paused, wariness warring against both the urge to help and to make things right, then rushed towards the door. He stopped halfway through and turned around.

“Stick with the kid,” Tony said, pointing accusingly at Kristoff. "And we'll be talking about this later. Tony brushed off his wariness about where Kristoff's loyalty truly lay. It didn't matter right now. Then he was off, rushing after Fett. He didn't know why, but his feet led him up the stairwell instead of down. Tony trusted his instincts, bounding up the stairs three at a time.

“Oi! Fett! Wait up!”

Chapter End Notes

Yes, the Paramexor dude and the Colton dude are both 'real' Star Wars characters. Tantive II doesn't appear in Star Wars, but Tantive III has screen time. Wookipedia it up. They exist. Discreet references, yes, but they exist. -_-  

Yandr doesn't exist. Not in canon, at least. Y and R apparently exists, though. Don't know what that's all about. No idea how Jango is actually supposed to be like, because I don’t think I watched that part of the movies. Hopefully, he’s a stoic guy who doesn’t like to talk much and puts more emphasis on actions than words. If not... YOLO. I also moved his timeline back 10 years or something, to age him up. That means he's around 20, about two years since escaping from slavery.
I'm feeling kind of down, lately. Don't know what's been up with me. It's probably you readers cursing me for what I did to Suffee. I didn't expect you guys to like him that much. I don't know if I'm up to updating on the 26th. I hope this early update makes up for it.

Oh, and I admit I don't know what 'unfettered' means. It has the name 'Fett' in it, so I just used it.
Cotton Candy Clouds

Chapter Summary

Just a lil' filler chapter where SI puts down roots and Tony does stuff.

Chapter Notes

April Fools! Did I get you? I noticed that my bookmarks fell down a bit when I posted it, so I guess /some/ people were fooled.

Guess what? I’m now betaing a Danny Phantom story AND a Harry Potter story! I gotta admit, it was a strain to read. Apparently, after four months of writing my own fics, I’ve developed what people call a ‘writing style.’ Reading someone else’s story was like culture shock. All of the phrasing is different than I would’ve written it, and I don’t know how much I’m allowed to suggest with that. Well, it’s an ongoing project, and I’m sure we’ll all learn a lot from it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As the Y-not flew towards Alderaan, Tony stared blankly at the endless expanse of space zooming at him. Just a couple of years ago, such a sight would’ve sent him into the whirling depths of a panic attack. Thanos’s attack and subsequent defeat were good for something, though. Tony now knew that space held nothing that he couldn’t handle. He helped defeat the best of the best that space could throw him, the boss baddie, so he shouldn’t be scared. But you had the Avengers, his subconscious told him.

Tony brushed it off. Ex-vengers, not Avengers. And that didn’t matter. He didn’t need the Ex-Vengers when he had the Y-not crew. At least, that was what he told himself. He didn’t need to fear anything at this sector of space. Everything that could be found there had already been noted. There were no nasty surprises waiting for them.


He felt a dull ache of pain when he realized he had no one to share that decision with. The crew probably wouldn’t even like the name, given how juvenile it was.

Tilting the Y-not into an angular dive while in hyperspace, Tony thought of how the second meeting with Fett had gone. Fett had been waiting at the top of the stairwell, framed by the stars in the sky and the Y-not that hovered almost threateningly above them. In stark contrast to how agreeable and young he seemed back inside, the other bounty hunter had been armed and ready for a fight.

-I feel like you're going to pull over and snuff me-

Tony eyed the blaster that he was met with with something that was not quite wariness. “Surprise!
"I didn't come up here to kill you," he couldn't resist saying sarcastically.

"Speak," Fett demanded.

Instantly on his guard, Tony snapped back, “I am speaking. You’re the one giving one-word answers. Why don’t you talk, for a change?” Tony knew before the words left his lips that it was the wrong thing to say. Fett went rigid and Tony recognized the look of deep-seated trauma. “Sorry,” he apologized. “I’m a little on edge, right now.”

Fett took a step back and Tony knew that if he didn’t say anything, he’d never see the quiet younger man again. Pulling his blaster - a physical threat that Fett could monitor - off his belt, Tony tossed it lightly at Fett’s feet and raised his arms in the universal surrender sign.

- I feel like you're going to pull over and snuff me -

Talking him down - not to be mistaken with ‘taking him down’ - had been no joke and it almost didn’t work. Tony hadn’t even been able to convince the much younger bounty hunter to ally himself with the crew or accept protection. It must have been confusing for Fett, without knowing the protectiveness Tony had always held for the youngsters of his chosen professions, whatever it may be at the time.

The man was no child, but Tony felt a duty to protect him nonetheless, most likely to his trepidatious, almost fearful demeanor. Tony didn’t have much with him and he didn’t think that Fett would wait for him to run to his workshop to grab something, so Tony just gave him the contents of his pocket.

Honestly, Tony hadn’t meant to give them over. They were just prototypes that Tony were planning on trying out. He had no idea if they actually worked, but knowing himself as well as he did, Tony was rather certain they worked. The look in Fett’s eyes told Tony that both of the gadgets he handed over would be stripped down and inspected for traps and tracers. Fett had reluctantly taken Tony’s number, and even more reluctantly handed his over. Tony wasn’t even sure if Fett had given him a real number or a fake one. He certainly wasn’t looking to be friends, but at least Tony was sure they weren’t enemies.

- I feel like you're going to pull over and snuff me -

Fett stuffed the items inside one of his pockets, glancing at Tony, then the Y-not. Suddenly a blaster was in his hand. He shot something at Tony, smoky but decidedly non-lethal. Tony went down coughing to the sound of FRIDAY’s angered cries.

“Calm down, Fri,” Tony coughed out between hysterical giggles. “It’s nonlethal. He just doesn’t want to reveal all his cards.”

Sure enough, Fett was long-gone by the time the smoke cleared. Not even the teammates around the perimeter, far from the smoke, were able to spot him fleeing.

- I feel like you're going to pull over and snuff me -

And there was still Kristoff to think of.

The thought had his muscles stiffening and he froze, unable to finish the maneuver. The ship began subtly vibrating as the forces upon it increased in a way that couldn’t be good, Tony only catching it due to his enhanced senses. FRIDAY, his dear daughter who would never betray him, caught the ship before it could go out of control, gently guiding it in a slow spiral that finished the basic evasive maneuver. It was a maneuver that even inexperienced Suffee could’ve done without any
A deliberate scuff of cloth on metal had Tony numbly turning his head to look over the empty chairs in copilot and weapons stations to meet the eyes of Shoragg where he sat at the navigation station. “Anything wrong, boss?” the Rodian asked quietly, caught in the silence of what they chose as the night-cycle. Any other time, Tony would’ve laughed at Shoragg’s use of the term ‘boss,’ a term that he had clearly picked up from FRIDAY. He would’ve shared the thought so Shoragg could’ve had a laugh too. Instead, Tony forced his head into a shake. Shoragg hesitated but turned back to his work.

The door slid open, Kovlo standing in the lowered lighting that spilled in from the corridor. “Felt the ship shake. Something wrong? Do you need me?”

Of course he felt it. Humans were pretty low on the sensitivity scale, with most species ranking above them. Tony was grateful that Shoragg shook his head in response, taking control of the situation. “No, just go back upstairs.” Kovlo hesitated, glancing in the direction of the the sensors and communication stations, where he was supposed to be - it was technically his shift. “Friday has it under control,” Shoragg reminded him.

“That I do!” FRIDAY said brightly, way too brightly for the night-cycle, judging from Kovlo and Shoragg’s complementing cringes. “Sorry,” FRIDAY apologized, lowering the tone of her voice.

“That’s alright, Miss,” Kovlo said, waving it away. “I’ll be back in the bunk. Call if you need me.” He turned and walked away, the doors sliding shut behind him.

Tony and Shoragg worked in silence, the Rodian’s screen opened at the corner of Tony’s, so that the human could help him with his calculations when the Rodian ran into trouble. The beeping of his console caused both of them to jerk, too deep in their work to notice the discreet countdown. Shoragg looked at the door with a frown - Greer was supposed to replace him for his shift.

“Mister Greer will be down momentarily. He was having trouble navigating the ship,” FRIDAY informed them.

This finally made Tony crack a smile. For all of his hard work and eagerness to help, the man was terrible at finding his way around even the cargo hold. That was the reason why Tony had put him on navigation duty - to hopefully help him out with it. “Just go,” Tony told Shoragg. “You’ve been here for hours, and I know you’re tired. Greer will be right down.”

“Two at the bridge at all times,” the Rodian reminded him sternly.

“What am I, chopped liver?” FRIDAY asked. Shoragg paused, reviewing the datapad of Earth terms that FRIDAY had given all members of the ship. “Third page,” she told him.

Finding it, Shoragg nodded to the main camera in the bridge. “My apologies, Miss Friday. I did not mean to imply that.”

“No problem!” FRIDAY said. Shoragg left and Tony was all alone in the deserted room. “What’s taking Greer so long?”

“He tripped over a bag of flour. He is now kicking it and cursing it out,” FRIDAY said, her tone telling him exactly what she thought of that. Tony would’ve been worried, but he knew that Greer was unusually disagreeable when woken up before morning. Taking his anger out on a bag of flour wasn’t out of character. As acerbic as Greer could be when his beauty sleep was interrupted, he would never take his anger out on a living being.
“Tell me when he gets here.” With that, Tony began completing the more advanced calculations, leaving simple ones to go over with the near-human.

FRIDAY pulsed the screen slightly, warning him that she was about to speak. “Boss, Kristoff is sending a transmission. Should I monitor and trace?” FRIDAY asked softly.

“No.” Tony didn’t look away from his work.

“Boss-” FRIDAY started.

“No, I’m done with this. Done.” Instead of the anger or frustration that could’ve colored his tone, it was simply stated, reflecting the emptiness he felt inside. That probably alarmed his girl more than any emotion he could have used.

“Dad…”

“Friday, just leave it alone,” Tony asked her pleadingly. FRIDAY obligingly directed new calculations at him, and Tony considered the discussion finished. “Twelve more hours until we reach Alderaan,” Tony muttered, glancing at the clock.

- I feel like you're going to pull over and snuff me -

Their entrance into the capital city of Alderaan was treated as a festivity. It seemed like every human who lived in Aldera was on the streets. Music filled the air and children laughed and chased each other between the many stalls that surrounded the streets. The tables themselves were laden with colorful baubles and bite-sized morsels. By the state of the decorations, this type of open partying didn’t happen often on Alderaan.

Tony was fine with the attention, but the rest of the crew wasn’t. Tony discreetly notified Prestor of this. Despite the elder Organa’s reluctance, the impromptu parade was cut short, the lengthy speeders correcting their course to a more linear route to the palace. Over half of his crew had opted to stay back on the ship, pretending that they didn’t exist, but for several members, there was no escape.

Due to being the co-captain, Suffee had to be there. He sat stiffly in the back, back straight and determinedly staring ahead. A muscle twitched in Shoragg’s jaw. He was only there for his son, who had surprisingly volunteered. Bai-Gon waved mechanically, Greer grinned uneasily, and Kristoff glared daggers. The first had lost yet another bet, while the latter two had drawn the short straws and were forced to be there. Meanwhile, Gis and Hoviv were grinning savagely and waving at the crowds, locked in a battle for who could get the most attention. Galee beat them both, sitting prim and proper as a princess.

After an obligatory meeting and dinner with Queen Antilles and her court, Tony and his crew were taken in by the Organa’s, where they met up with the rest of the crew. Bail pestered him for FRIDAY but was deflected when Gis, with all the tact of a rampaging bull, demanded a tour of the city. The poor Alderaanian eventually had to cart off Gis, Hoviv, Hoviv’s younger sister, and the whole Aleena pack for a sightseeing trip. Tony could hear Gis and FRIDAY chortling and conspiring with each other over the earpiece link. He already felt sorry for the younger Organa.

“So,” Tony began, “the reason I came here is to start up my company, the company you all heard me babble about on the news.”

Prestor raised an eyebrow. “You are asking for land.”

“No,” Tony said emphatically. “I’m asking to rent land from you.”
“Me,” Prestor said flatly.

“Look, you’ve already paid your debt to me. The ship’s awesome,” Tony assured him.

“The Y-Not,” the Viceroy pronounced carefully. He pronounced it with a slight lilt that made it sound like ‘Y-naut,’ which sounded a lot better to Tony, sort of like a play on the word ‘astronaut.’ “Its maiden voyage is an unannounced visit to the home of the one who purchased it.” It should bother Tony that the Alderaanian was keeping tabs on him, but Tony figured he should be flattered. He certainly was someone to keep an eye on.

“Say it backwards,” Tony insisted, waggling his eyebrows. “Come on, say it!”

“Ton-why?” Prestor tried after a moment, waiting a moment before his eyes widened. “Tone-ee? Tony? You named your starship after yourself?” His tone was wrought with disapproval. Tony tried not to let it bother himself so much.

“The name explains it. Why not?” Tony asked with a shrug and a grin. Prestor shook his head helplessly. Tony took control of the conversation again. “Anyways, I wasn’t asking for you to just hand me over a plot of land. I want to rent it from you.”

“Cut the dramatics,” Prestor said sternly.

“Sorry, force of habit,” Tony said with a wince. “Lowered prices for electronics, economic stimulation, local profits. For me, I get some protection from being based on a government that doesn’t entirely hate me - long story,” Tony said hastily at Prestor’s interested look. “I get fair taxes and a government that isn’t trying to steal my work. Mostly, protection, though. Most of the profits from SI will go to improving living conditions across the galaxy.”

Both of Prestor’s eyebrows raised. “You mean to use Alderaan as a shield. But… from what?”

“The Republic? Bounty hunters? Maybe even individual planets. I plan on helping mostly those on the Outer Rim, but I’m beginning to believe that I will get more pushback than I thought. There are many people who benefit off of the misery of others,” Tony said, waving his arm around. “Truth is, I don’t know yet.”

“And you believe the awards would be worth the risks?” Prestor leaned back in his chair.

Shaking his head, Tony leaned forward and hit his palm lightly on the wooden table to punctuate his next sentence. “You’re not listening. I don’t know if there will be any more benefits to Alderaan than what I already said. I’m planning on raising living conditions on impoverished planets. The ruling classes might not like that, keeping the peasants uneducated to keep themselves at the top. That’s where Alderaan comes in. No one would expect Alderaan of being the main base of this operation. Even if they somehow trace it back to Alderaan, you guys are part of the Core Worlds. Even without your fleet, they wouldn’t dare attack. This whole thing isn’t even illegal.”

“You sound... dangerously like anarchist.” Prestor tapped the tips of his fingers together, staring shrewdly at Tony. “And you want me to agree to this arrangement, an arrangement that wouldn’t help my people, only people we will never see, in return for a mere pittance?”

Tony froze up. Did he misjudge Prestor? He seemed like someone who cared about the general
population, but this wouldn’t be the first time Tony had misjudged the character of a ‘friend.’ Politicians didn’t get to where they were by pure charisma. There was only one thing he could do - tell the truth. Tony answered in the only way he could. “Yes.”

A smile broke across Prestor’s face and he nodded approvingly. “Glad we reached this understanding. I would be honored to help you in this endeavor.”

- I feel like you're going to pull over and snuff me -

Despite his best efforts, Prestor seemed more bemused than anything at Tony’s efforts at helping the galaxy. Tony had thought there were a few hundred planets in the Outer Rim. His surprise to know that there were literal *thousands* rivaled his reaction to finding out the number of Jedi that existed.

The sheer number was staggering. Thousands of planets. Trillions of people. An almost infinite amount of funds. This wasn’t something that could be abolished in a lifetime. If Tony stopped to think about it, he would be filled with hopelessness, so he didn’t. He wondered for a brief moment if Prestor was laughing at the futility of his efforts before dismissing that thought. If Prestor wanted to laugh, he would do it in Tony’s face, not behind his back.

Still, he had to start somewhere. The Merchant of Death would sell death no more.

Tony was given a plot of land on a relatively uninhabited mountain range. There, Tony quickly hired a construction crew to build a facility that he and FRIDAY planned out on the trip there. Handing over the blueprints, Tony ordered them to build it to the exact specifications. Chewie, who felt like an outsider to the crew, despite Suffee’s best efforts, decided to stay there for a while to monitor the progress. Tony felt bad about it, but was unable to convince the Wookie to come with them. The Wookie had brought up some points that Tony was forced to admit were quite true. With the types of bounties they went after, Chewie was like taking a bantha into a junkshop. He stood out and would hinder them.

Next, he stopped at some rickety warehouse and bought some machinery for cheap. He rigged up what he could and ordered several parts he couldn’t find from a local parts dealer, knowing that Prestor would appreciate it.

Lastly, he sent some specs to a failing Alderaanian parts manufacturer, revitalizing the company with the large deal. After giving them some very specific instructions, the crew left to Naboo, ferrying some small but precious cargo as a some favor to Prestor. Tony wasn’t sure what was in the crates, but FRIDAY assured them that none of them registered as ‘toxic’ or ‘harmful’ to the limited sensors on the ship. Tony made note to upgrade them but respected Prestor enough not to go snooping to see what was inside the crates.

Tony never realized how much Kristoff was present until he was actively trying to avoid the other man. Kristoff was always on the bridge, if not flying the *Y-not* himself, then training someone else to steer it. When he wasn’t there, he always seemed to be in the kitchen that they used as a very cramped ‘cafeteria.’

Tony knew that his recent suspicion of Kristoff meant that his mind was naturally taking everything Kristoff did out of context, but he couldn’t help it. Even as a genius, his mind fell into the traps that normal people did. He wasn’t a robot, after all.

Kristoff’s chuckles grated on him, sounding almost mocking. The card tricks he sometimes pulled were a sore reminder that the man used to hustle people for money and recounts of his smuggling days now sounded like reckless endangerment instead of startling bravery. And the whistling had
On an average day, Tony would see Kristoff a grand minimum of twice a day, and that was with locking himself in the workshop and bribing Gis to bring him food, with Gis did with a look that said he clearly thought Tony was an idiot but was humoring him.

Tony knew that his paranoia had reached a peak when he started wondering whether or not the look Gis gave him when he brought food meant that the Saurin had added something suspicious to it. He made a resolution to spend more time out of those two rooms.

The door to the bridge was open when Tony popped out of the captain’s quarters after a few days in hyperspace. It was impossible to tell what time it was - there was no star to spin around, and the point was moot anyways. Who cared, when the day lengths varied and a ship could visit three consecutive planets in the height of their light-cycles without taking a break?

“Alright, who changed the coordinates?” Tony heard Suffee ask as he turned to walk down the hall and up the stairs to get some breakfast. Tony abruptly did an about-face and marched into the bridge. Someone messing around the systems was definitely his problem.

“It wasn’t me,” Bai-Gon objected to the pointed question.

“Right!” Quinton agreed. “T’was like that when we got here for our shift!”

Looking over his shoulder, Suffee caught sight of him. “Tony!” he exclaimed, eyes darting from the starmap to Tony. “Did you change the coordinates?”

“Nope. Why would I? I don’t know Naboo from Mars. They’re all the same to me, really,” Tony answered, smirking and shaking his head self-deprecatingly. “Where are we headed now?” he asked, peering over the Rodian’s shoulder as he typed ‘Mars’ into the search box. Other than a dish that somehow looked southern despite being alien, there were zero hits.

“Actually, boss, the destination wasn’t changed. We’re still headed to Naboo. It’s just that we’re headed to Geonosis afterwards,” FRIDAY chimed in. “The person who changed it...” she trailed off, hesitating. Suffee turned to the cousins again, eyes narrowed. Seeing this, the two men immediately began protesting their innocence. Then, the door slid open behind Tony.

“It was me, actually.” Kristoff.

Suffee crossed his arms and tapped his foot on the floor impatiently, but it was Bai-Gon who talked first. “Not cool, man!” he complained. “The cap blamed me for it.” Kristoff gave Tony a side-glance. “The other cap, Captain Suffee,” Bai-gon corrected.

“It’s my turn to pick,” Kristoff reminded them.

Tony eyed the closest camera. “It’s true, boss. Kristoff has never chosen our destination before, and his chosen destination is quite close, so by the rules we set in the beginning, he’s allowed to direct the Y-not to Geonosis,” Friday confirmed.

Correctly interpreting Tony’s introspective silence as disapproval, Kristoff said coaxingly, “It’s just a little off your route to Ryloth. Just land over there for a few days, enjoy the sights... Hey, you’re starting to look a little pale from all your time in a ship. How about you go tan a bit under the nice, warm, Geonosis sun, whatever they call it?”

“It certainly doesn’t look welcoming,” Suffee said, flicking through pictures of sandy deserts and barren rock fields.
“Hey, you can just drop me off on the way to Ryloth and pick me up when you get bac-” Kristoff started.

“But certainly much more welcoming than Ryloth,” Suffee finished. At Tony’s betrayed glance, Suffee shrugged and said, “I say it as I see it. Very violent desert planet gladiatorial games versus a very druggy mining planet where you can get taken as a slave without warning? Tough choice, but I’d rather die fast than slow, if you catch my drift.”

Tony gave him a long look. “That was… incredibly morbid, actually. Hey Fri, does this galaxy have antidepressants?”

“I don’t need antidepressants.”

“The most widely used antidepressant derived from ryll, a relatively mild spice that coincidentally mined on Ryloth.” Dozens of files appeared before him as Tony flipped off of

“Huh, that’s awfully convenient,” Tony said slowly. “How much is it worth?”

“It’s illegal for non-medical companies to mine and use,” FRIDAY chided him. “Besides, the effects closely mirror that of cannabis.”

“Right. Now I’m starting to understand why it’s illegal. Suff’? Don’t get into that sort of thing. We’ll get you through this hard, hard time t-”

“I am not depressed, and if you continue insisting that I am, I’ll take back the scraps you liberated from Prestor’s junkyard,” Suffee threatened.

“Can we just get to the point?” Kristoff asked. “I promise that it’ll be a quick trip, five days on Geonosis, tops. I have to contact Chewie after this, so…” He looked pleadingly at Tony.

Running his fingers through his hair, Tony answered, “Ryloth first.”

Normally, Kristoff would have agreed with Tony, trusting the implication that they would go to Geonosis right after Ryloth. However, in this case, Kristoff asked for a verbal promise. Tony agreed and gave him his word that they would go after he finished what he was trying to do on Ryloth. The very fact that this promise was needed stunned the other three members of the crew, but while Bai-Gon and Quinton opted to keep quiet about it, Suffee decided to speak out. “What happened this time?”

“Nothing!” two voices rang out at the same time.

Kristoff slipped next to him and answered, “Just a simple miscommunication.”

“Nothing to worry about,” Tony continued.

“Which translates to ‘we really messed up’ and ‘run away screaming,’” Suffee told them.

“We’ll be fine,” Tony assured him.

Suffee looked unconvinced but gave a slow nod. The fragile peace was broken when Bai-Gon turned to his cousin and bet, “Fifty credits say this blows up spectacularly in our faces.”

- I feel like you're going to pull over and snuff me -

On Naboo, Tony and his crew didn’t get a second glance from the nobles of Naboo. They didn’t even warrant a visit from a Handmaiden. A security officer - not even the head of security - bustled
around the cargo hold, made a call with several people, then took the crates without pomp. Y-nauts were reluctantly given a twelve-hour permission slip to stay on Naboo and sternly informed that they must be long-gone by the time it hit zero.

When Senn expressed some interest in exploring, they were assigned a guide who was a Handmaiden-in-training, as if the general populace needed protection from them. Tony was disappointed, having expected people that resembled Luna Lovegood.

Apologetically, the friendly guide that they were assigned explained to them that, as a peace-loving planet, they found the Y-not ‘mildly offensive’ and ‘a bit old-fashioned.’ That didn’t mean much to Tony; having been raised in politics, he read between the lines easily enough. The people of Naboo saw their well-armored ship and showy cannons and immediately stereotyped them as uncouth, disrespectful warmongers. Fair enough. Bounty hunting meant that their job could basically be described as ‘flying around, looking for trouble.’ At least they weren’t calling his crew ‘the Merchants of Death.’

The Aleena darted into the crowd, determined to see as much as they could before time ran out, but the rest of the crew was put silent by the nonverbal disapproval that radiated from almost all of the Naboo. When the time came for them to leave, they did so without complaint.

They reached Ryloth without incident. After restricting the underaged beings in the crew onto the ship, Tony repeatedly warned the rest of the Y-nauts to stick in pairs at the very least and to stay on the main roads. Then, he headed out to do what he had wanted to for a long time.

- *I feel like you're going to pull over and snuff me-*

#SawSomethingStrange #WhatIsThis #FlyingRedDroid #LegitArsenalOnTheMove #DontHurtMe

Check this out. Saw it blasting away from the mines as I was driving my speeder away from the Nabat. Is it just me, or is it rather well-equipped for a drone? Here’s to hoping it’s not dangerous.

[image.420]

-RylothRises

[Site correction: #IronMan]

#TechnicalHelp #IronMan

@RylothRises I took the liberty of editing your hashtag for you for a more fitting one.

-HisGirlFRIDAY

Chapter End Notes

Just saw ten seconds of the Infinity War trailer. Danggit, the suit’s INSIDE OF HIM?!
Do I need to rewrite this entire thing? Do I have to go back and ‘suffering-from-iron-deficiency,-must-eat-phrik-to-make-armor’ this entire thing?!

Look, I’m unoriginal, okay? That’s why I take plot points like 'betrayal,' 'secrets,' and 'team breaking apart,' from the Avengers and make Tony repeat them, even if he’s in a brand-new universe. Tony’s not perfect, but he admits it and he tries, which is why he’s one of my top ten favorite characters.

No, Kristoff is not a copy of Han. Likewise, Han is not a copy of Kristoff. Han got frozen in carbon in the Originals, but Kristoff is not going to react like Han would to the same situation. Don’t hold my characters to the same standards. Heck, even their namesakes are the exact opposite. I got the name Kristoff off of Han’s foil in Frozen. The Elsa movie, you know, Anna’s two love interests? Evil-but-charming prince and a rough-but-gold-hearted commoner? Anyone catch that? No?
Drawing Lines

Chapter Summary

Apparently, there's going to be repercussions to having a highly-armored, lethally weaponized red robot flying around and blasting the kriff out of some settlements. Who knew?

Chapter Notes

So last update, I changed the title, summary, and tags of this story to: "Our Friendship Unites: Pinkie Pie's older sister has returned to Equestria after leaving years ago to follow a trail their parents left behind before they disappeared over a decade ago. Though she returned empty-handed, Cerulean Cupcake was thrilled to be home, but soon realizes that something has followed her back. READERS PICK THE PLOT! Comment to decide what happens next!"

Great April Fools prank. I fooled a bunch of you with that one. I fooled some of you so badly, you unBookmark'd me. Probably was probably a bad literary decision for me to do that, but it was SO WORTH IT.

This is probably my longest chapter yet. Most of my chapters average 4,500 words, not counting the ANs. This one... Honestly, I was going to cut it off at the part where Suffee claims, "accidents happen and people die," but I figured that was too cruel. Then I wanted to end it where Suffee gets in the middle of it, but didn't. Maybe I was bored. I don't know.

Finals are coming up, so be prepared for increasingly stressed Author's Notes and sub-standard, poorly-thought-out chapters like this one. Seriously. If any of you have suggestions for the last part of this chapter, please tell me. I can go back and change it. They both turned out to be the villain this chapter, but I was on a time limit, so...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The group of slaves huddled at the back of their cavern as Tony slowly bent the bars out. “I mean you no harm. I am trying to free you,” Tony felt the need to repeat again in Basic. Seeing no reaction, he requested FRIDAY to translate it to the second most commonly used language on Ryloth. Twi'leki, also confusingly known as both Rylothean and Ryl, played loudly from the Iron Man speakers and Tony memorized it.

The only response he received was a baby somewhere in the group whimpering before quickly being shushed. Tony stood aside after creating a hole large enough for a Wookie to pass through, not that there was one in the group. None of them stepped forward.

“Um, you can go now? Promise I won't blast you!” Tony winced and glanced at the unconscious guard slumped against the wall. Probably was a bad idea to knock him out in front of the slaves. “He’s just unconscious, I swear! The dude’s definitely breathing.” His accent warped slightly at the
Basic word for ‘dude.’ Technically, it didn’t mean ‘dude’ the way Tony was used to, more of a rough equivalent to ‘acquaintance I’m unfamiliarly familiar with’ on an minor space hub. He belatedly realized that using that word choice was a bad idea too.

The slaves looked at each other, muttering lowly. Tilting his head, Tony flicked his fingers, nonverbally signalling FRIDAY to boost the microphones. The voices became louder, but they were just as cluttered as before. Tony had FRIDAY translate it to Basic, but he could still only pick out fragments, FRIDAY unable to decide which conversation to pick from.

“-telling the truth.”

“-a trick?”

“My baby!”

“-t we cannot-”

“But it’s not-”

“-think we should tell him?”

A little hand grasped a groove along his wrist to tug on his gauntlet. “Mister?” a high, reedy voice asked. “Mister, if we step outta this, they gonna 'splode us!”

“'Splode’ as in explode?” Tony asked, feeling nauseous. He received a rapid nod. “Friday, call the nearest droid shop. We’re going to need their best medical droid. Money is no-”

“It's ready for pickup.”

“Huh. Now that's service,” Tony said, nodding in approval. He disengaged the armor and stepped out. “Mind being the Uber driver for me?”

“Boss, are you sure you'll be alright?”

“I'll be fine, Fri,” Tony reassure her. “Go get our new friend.”

“Well, that's not an Uber driver does, anyways!” FRIDAY declared. The armor sealed itself, spun on its heel, and took off.

“Wait, then what does an Uber driver do?” Tony yelled after the red streak, having admittedly never Uber-ed before. “Don’t worry, help is on the way,” he said, realizing that yelling might’ve startled the slaves. No answer. He turned to see the kid being hustled back into the crowd. The adults gathered around in a huddle and Tony had no doubt that the children and the elderly were safely nestled in the very center of it.

Feeling naked in enemy territory without his armor on or at least a tailored suit, Tony held up his hands in surrender and stepped through the gap he made. He slowly put his hand into his pocket, telegraphing his movements so they could see him withdraw a jar of bacta. “Bacta,” he explained. Kneeling down, he slid it over to the group.

A particularly brave Twi’lek snatched and opened it, dipping a finger in. His head-tentacles waved in a way that looked affirmative, and then everyone seemed to be trying to snag a bit on their fingers. At first, Tony thought it was a free-for-all, but quickly realized that there was some system that he wasn’t privy to. All the majorly injured beings had bacta applied to their wounds before the minor scrapes were taken care of.
As their wariness wore off, some of the people started drifting closer. At first, Tony thought it was a display of trust, but as a couple of the bigger guys in the cavern started looking at Tony speculatively and Tony started to think that walking unarmed into a cave of angry people was a bad idea. He wasn’t in any danger, of course, but physically restraining an attacker could have a bad effect on how friendly they perceived him as. “Friday, how much longer?” he asked, once again moving so he wasn’t about to be cornered or surrounded, a harder task than expected.

“Two seconds,” FRIDAY reported.

“What?” Tony looked up, face-to-face with the Iron Man armor. Well, not really. It was actually quite a bit taller than him, so he was more like eyeing its neck, at first. His eyes fell on the slightly conical droid with a rounded head, baffled. “Oh. Ask the droid to start removing the ‘sploders. Er, explosives. Wait, we have anesthetic, right?”

“Already ahead of you, boss!” FRIDAY answered cheerfully as she righted the droid. Tony appreciated the fact that she was speaking out loud; at least he didn’t look crazy, like he was talking to air. He wasn’t sure how common earpieces were. “Meet FX-8! His series model, not serial number.”

“Hi… Fix-eight? I’ll call you Fixit, okay? Fex?” The band that went a complete 380 around its head glowed an ominous red and it swiveled around, away from him, though it no doubt could already see what was behind it. Tony figured he was being dismissed or given the cold shoulder. “Er, I’m guessing he doesn't like his name?”

“Actually, he just doesn’t like you,” FRIDAY corrected.

“Blasphemy!” Tony declared. “Everyone likes me! Right, Fix-y?”

‘Fix-y’ turned his body slowly, so that he was fully facing Tony. What seemed like all of his - its? - panels opened and the different arms and tools he had unfolded, wreathing him in a menacing halo of medical tools. It whirred and advanced on him threateningly.

“See? He wants to fix me and make sure I’m healthy!” Tony said, taking a firm step back. “I’m alright, little guy. Just make sure all of the trackers are out, okay?”

Fixit tucked away most of his veritable armory of tools and turned to the closest Twi’lek, who quickly scrambled out of reach.

“Actually, keep an eye on him. I don’t trust him,” Tony told FRIDAY. He found the brave Twi'lek from before, coaxing him to the med droid by offering him two knives, one given before the operation and one to be given after.

The work was done quickly. The droid located the tracker, sliced open the skin, deactivated and removed the device, applied bacta, and tightly wrapped the wound. The slaves quickly realized what was happening and lined up, allowing Tony to clean the area after it was scanned and FRIDAY to take over the bacta and wrapping. It was only after the fourteenth patient - a little half-Twi’lek girl - that something interesting happened.

The Twi’lek that must have been the kid’s mother fell to her knees. “Arni’soyacho,” she said reverently, reaching for Tony. “Arni’soyacho.” It was the extreme form of ‘thank you’ for their language, if Tony was correct. So what was ‘you’re welcome,’ again?

“Koahiko?” Tony tried.

The Twi’leks hushed and even the humans glanced up curiously. “Nawara,” they said to each other.
The alcoholic wipes were tugged from his fingers, the Twi’leks bowing and taking over the job for him. As far as Tony could tell, it wasn’t done out of malice or distrust - the slaves, no matter the species - all cast him deferential looks from time to time. From what he could extrapolate from this, it was probably because they respected him too much to let him do such a humble job.

“What’s up with the crew?” Tony asked, feeling awkward just standing there.

“Kristoff has decided to spend the night out with a lady-friend he made, Galee and Charell went shopping.”

“Alone?” Tony asked, alarmed. There could be slavers just waiting for a pretty face like Galee’s, and Charell was no pushover in that area either.

“-with Greer,” FRIDAY continued, making her displeasure at his interruption clear, “Gis and Hoviv are picking on the locals...” After a little more cajoling, FRIDAY gave him a quick summary of exactly what they were doing to the locals before finishing off with what the others in the crew were doing. Tony was a little worried about the Aleenas - they were a naturally curious folk and could be easily taken advantage of by the more malicious folk. Tony didn’t like that Kristoff had left them for a date, but FRIDAY was quick to assure him that Kristoff had called the cousins over before he left.

“Wait, what about Suff’?” Tony asked, realizing that someone was missing from the group.

“Doing some experiments with me,” FRIDAY said blithely.

“Friday,” Tony said sternly.

“Boss.”

“Baby girl...”

“Dad.”

“...Okay, you win this round. I’ll find out, sooner or later, though.”

“As long as ‘sooner’ means ‘not now,’ I think we’ll be fine,” FRIDAY told him cheekily. Tony hummed absentmindedly, waving the huddle of freed slaves clustered near the hole at his approval, most of them filed out and scattered. A few of them hovered at the edges, probably waiting for their friends or relatives to have their devices removed.

Sensing rather than hearing someone approach, Tony saw a human approaching. “Alema,” he said, clasping his hands together and bowing his head. He was gone before Tony could answer, but in his place was a pink Twi’lek.

“Allesh,” she murmured with a small nod. She walked out the cavern without a backwards glance. Tony stared after them. He recognized the words to run along the lines of ‘protector’ and ‘safety,’ but was completely lost on how to reply to that. Every so often, someone - somebeing? - would approach him and give him a title or compliment, something of that sort. The room slowly emptied until he was only left with a pair of Twi’lek girls.

He followed them out, FRIDAY behind him, holding Fixit. They gently took ahold of his wrists and led him away from the store. Tony quickly conversed nonverbally with FRIDAY, but neither of them could puzzle out what the two wanted. “Friday, set the charges. I want this place blown
sky-high,” Tony said, deciding to follow them in case they needed help.

“Not a chance, boss. This could be a trap.”

Unable to convince FRIDAY otherwise, they traveled in a strange group through the silent craigs. Tony could see lights from the closest town somewhere in the distance, though none of the buildings. They reached an abandoned hut, after a mile or two.

“Taw’janii, ” one of the Twi’leks murmured. Honored guest. Not as flashy as some of the other things he had been called over the last couple of hours, but still pretty nice. Then, she fluttered her eyelashes and tugged him closer, leaning in.

Oh. The ‘guest' thing made a lot more sense. Wait... Oh.

Tony quickly detached himself. “Yeah, okay. I’m not... You don’t have to repay me for anything. You don’t deserve-” Tony faltered at the incomprehension and hurt on her face. “Friday, tell them that... Tell them that they’re free and they don’t have to do that anymore.”

With one last look at the two, Tony grabbed the charges from FRIDAY and jogged back in the direction of the cells. He didn’t look back, not wanting to see what happened.

-Tony, someone dies on your watch, you don't give up-

“Tony! Get back to the ship,” Suffee ordered as Tony dodged another shot. He was in the middle of his third raid on this planet. Ryloth was certainly wising up to his attacks.

“Kinda in the middle of something,” Tony grunted as he dodged some sort of high-energy particle beam. At least, that was what it looked like to Tony. He honestly didn’t have much working knowledge of the more obscure weapons in this galaxy, despite taking apart enough blasters to give a shopkeeper a nervous breakdown.

“You have to get back, now. We’re leaving,” Suffee said with a hint of anxiety.

“What? But we just got here!” Tony protested.

“I’ll buy your ryl and whatever else you want to experiment with, but we have to leave. Now.” The stress in Suffee’s voice had Tony hesitating as he sliced off the cuffs of some chains with some focused lazors.

“Suffee, I’m in the middle of something delicate, right now,” he said, slowing down so he wouldn’t burn the skin. “Could you please explain to me the situation so we can talk about it once I get back on the ship?”

“There’s a rogue droid going around Ryloth, maybe more than one. I’m not too clear on that,” Suffee reported. Tony choked and had to deactivate his lazer so he could turn away and cough. “We have to get away before it injures someone. We have data suggesting it’s on ____. Greer and Galee are just ten minutes away from the site it’s currently attacking. What if they were actually there and gotten injured? This droid is on a rampage, and I won’t have any of our teammates hurt because of it!” Suffee declared strongly.

Tony made an inarticulate sound that was somewhere between a whine and a groan. Maybe he should have focused more on Iron Man’s PR than just strictly freeing slaves. “Suffee,” Tony said, voice strained, “the droid hasn’t killed anyone. I-”

“Yet.”
“What?”

“It hasn’t killed anyone yet. Who knows? Maybe it’s just residue programming and the thing will suddenly go berserk.”

“It’s freeing slaves,” Tony argued. “It’s a hero.”

“Freeing slaves?” Suffee repeated, uncertain.

That gave Tony pause. “Exactly what have you been reading about the droid?” he asked warily.

“Well, it’s a kriffin’ awesome thing!” Kristoff’s voice rang out clearly.

“Gah! How long’ve you been here?” Tony yelped.

“Came on at ‘freeing slaves.’ Is that what the droid’s been doing? That’s flippin’ awesome!” Kristoff said enthusiastically. “vote that we capture it and make a ca-zillion of copies and send them on a rampage through the Outer Rim.” Tony had an image of Kristoff blasting him from the sky, cutting through the armor and peeling it back, leaving Tony vulnerable on the ground before the shield came crashing down and-

Suffee’s ringing voice cut him out from that destructive spiral, telling him that no, they didn’t know he was Iron Man, and they wouldn’t do that if they knew. “No, you’re not going to-

“Huh, that idea has some merit,” Tony mused, catching up to what Kristoff had said. Reactivate the Iron Legion and send them across the galaxy, liberating people who desperately needed to be heard. He cut the last girl’s chains and blasted overhead as she ran out the door and disappeared into the night. Tony switched to thermal vision and looked around. Carefully looking for any hiding slaves or workers, he set the now-unoccupied slave shop on fire. He walked out of the shop as everything usable started to melt or turn to ash.

He tuned into Suffee strongly advocating against Kristoff’s idea. “I… No! You’re not going to set some highly-armed droids on a warpath through the galaxy! What kind of idiotic idea is that? Do you know what the Hutts would do? Kriff, that whole idea is illegal. The Republic will be down on you harder than-

“Suff’, you’re brilliant and all, but maybe you should go to sleep and we can think about this in the morning,” Kristoff cajolled him.

“Afternoon,” Suffee said.

“What?”

“Evening. I am going to go drink a whole bottle of Corellian whiskey and bemoan the fact that our third-in-command is an idiot, the logistics of building a droid army, and that we have to stay on this forsaken planet for any longer than we have to,” Suffee groaned.

“Um… You realize that by setting the meeting in the afternoon, we’re delaying on leaving the planet?” Tony pointed out. Suffee huffed and turned off his earpiece with an audible click.

“Sheesh. Don’t listen to him, man. That’s a kriffing awesome idea. In fact, can I have my own little legion of droids?”

As he listened to Kristoff, Tony’s suspicions returned. What was Kristoff planning on doing with that many droids? “I’ll think about it,” Tony said shortly.
Not seeing the camera pointed at him, he turned on the thrusters. Iron Man rose and disappeared into the inky blackness.

- Tony, someone dies on your watch, you don't give up -

Suffee stormed into the bridge, causing everyone to look at him. He carefully tossed the datapad onto the main console, where Tony and Kristoff had been sitting across from each other and having an impromptu staring contest. It slid across the surface, tapping on Kristoff’s thermos and stopping. They both glanced down at it at the same time.

“You know, that probably would’ve been more effective if you just slammed it down,” Tony commented.

“I-! That’s not-” Suffee spluttered before the scales around his eyes discreetly darkened in a way that was similar to a human blushing. “It’s an expensive datapad!”

“An expensive datapad that you nearly spilled soup on,” Tony pointed out, indicating the opened thermos with a grin. Tony hooked a finger around the datapad and dragged it closer to himself when he saw Kristoff craning his head to look at it. Suffee slowed his pacing as he suddenly felt the tension that had been rising in the bridge for the last half-hour. It was petty, yes, but Tony felt he had the right to his pettiness. After a moment, Kristoff rolled his eyes and leaned back, putting his feet on the terminal. Most of the tension drained out, though there was still a strained undercurrent flowing throughout the room. Tony gave him a dirty look, which Kristoff promptly ignored.

“Boss, maybe you should just ask him what’s going on?” FRIDAY advised him privately. “I don’t want another family to fight,” she said, sounding like she was actually the three-year-old she technically was. Tony tensed, angling away from Suffee and Kristoff to mouth at the camera behind him, ‘Don’t mistake ‘team’ for ‘family.’” Because a family didn’t hide secrets like that from each other. A family didn’t betray each other. She was his mother and Rogers just- Detecting another impending panic attack, FRIDAY played a sound clip of the one (and only) time Tony had let Gis pilot the ship. ‘No, I don’t want to die!’ Hoviv yelled amidst Tony guffaws and Gis’s whoops. Tony snorted, shaking himself. He was with a different team, now, and it wouldn’t do any good to compare the two. He looked up to see Suffee, Galee, and Kristoff all watching him worriedly. Kristoff had circled around the terminal and his hand was inches from Tony’s shoulder.

“What’s wrong? You okay?”

“Nothing, just my kid being awesome.” Tony waved them off, spinning around in his chair. He caught a live feed on one of the screens facing him, at an angle so that none of the others could see it. FRIDAY was streaming Kristoff’s concerned face from a camera, his hand still outreached. He let his hand drop after another moment. It looked genuine, but… But then again, Tony was gullible and he wasn’t about to go down that same path again. He had been made a fool by Obadiah and had trusted Rogers, of all people.

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Fool me thrice… Tony looked away, down at the datapad in his hand.

On the screen was a dramatic picture of Iron Man strolling towards the camera, backlit by the burning store. The flames licked the armor in a way that made it look demonic. With the fire behind him, Iron Man was colored black. Other than the blood-red paint that could be seen on some of the edges on the right side, the smothering yellow-orange of his eyes was the only color on him. With the difficulties finding a material close to what he used back on Earth, he ended up
with a different primary color than his usual blue. It could’ve been worse, though. Red eyes
would’ve blended too much with the already-red suit and clash.

Hesitating, Tony had the entire article translated to Basic. “Rogue Droid Destroys Innocent
Shopkeeper’s Livelihood!” the title screamed at him. It went on to tell with great detail what
difficulty the owner, his brother, and his elderly parents would face.

“You know this is a load of bantha s***, right?” Tony asked. “That man was a slaver. He sold over
fifty slaves in the last month. He most likely has thousands and thousands of credits tucked away
somewhere. What I destroyed probably isn’t even a twentieth of his property, at least what is listed
online. He has three more shops like this one down in the south, only bigger.”

“That was a slave store?” Suffee questioned. Tony nodded, finishing his skim over the entire
article. He looked up to see Suffee and Kristoff seated at the other side of the terminal, Kristoff
with his feet back up. Galee was facing her own station, but Tony knew she was listening in on
them.

“Good riddance,” Kristoff agreed with a smirk.

“And the Rogue Droid only targets slavers?” Suffee asked, ignoring Kristoff.

“Not that it would be a big loss,” Kristoff added. Apparently realizing that simply ignoring him
wouldn’t work, Suffee turned and gave a death-stare. At Suffee’s look, Kristoff shrugged and said,
“Slavers are scum. Space the lot of them, I say.” Suffee started, aghast at the display of
vindictiveness, before turning his back on the ex-smuggler and looking at Tony, reverting back to
his earlier tactic of simply ignoring Kristoff.

“Not a single innocent casualty. No deaths on the side of the slavers either,” Tony confirmed
proudly.

Suffee eyed him suspiciously. “I still don’t like this. Droids are programmable. If someone gets
their hands on the Rogue Droid-”

“Iron Man,” FRIDAY cut in, voice flowing smoothly from a speaker attached to the terminal.

“What?” Suffee asked. Kristoff discreetly took his foot off the terminal, as if only now
remembering that it was FRIDAY’s ‘home,’ for lack of another term.

“The being that you have designated ‘Rogue Droid’ is called Iron Man,” FRIDAY said simply.

“Iron Man,” Suffee repeated with distaste.

“Hey, don’t you dare-” Kristoff started.

Suffee only raised his voice in response. “Impossible! Iron could not possibly withstand such heat
and force, not to mention the weight would not be conductive to-”

“Oh,” Kristoff said, sitting back. “Okay, yeah. No objections to that.”

“It is what he has been dubbed on StarkNet,” FRIDAY volunteered. Tony choked and glared at the
nearest camera. He had an idea who was behind that name. He was planning on calling himself
something more awesome, like ‘Supreme Man’ or ‘Man of Phrik.’ Didn’t have the same ring as
‘Iron,’ but still… Or maybe he could take a leaf out of the Guardians and call himself the Guardian
of the Galaxy? Nah, they’d probably shorten it to Double-G or something lame.

“He,” Suffee said flatly, having spotted that pronoun. “Are you saying that there’s a person inside
the droid?” he interrogated.

“Are you saying that just because I don’t have a body, I can’t be called a ‘she?’” FRIDAY countered.

“Oooh, burn!” Tony crackled.

“Are you assuming genders now?” Suffee asked, having received a stronger grasp on the concept of ‘sexism’ from FRIDAY. “For all you know, your ‘Iron Man’ could be a she.”

“‘He’ is the default term,” Tony claimed. It was true, after all.

“You know, I’d just give up now,” Kristoff advised Suffee. “Tony doesn’t lose.” With that, he shot a sly smirk at Tony. Not knowing how to respond to what sounded strangely like a threat, Tony just frowned aback. Kristoff merely raised an eyebrow, smirk still intact.

“Back to the topic,” Suffee said exasperatedly. “We should leave. Even if the droid isn’t killing people, accidents happen. I don’t want the Red Droid-”

“‘Iron Man,” FRIDAY corrected.

“...’s algorithm or something spotting Senn or Borr and cataloging them as ‘rodent’ and deciding they’re acceptable casualties.”

“The Red-” Kristoff glanced at the terminal, “Iron Man wouldn’t do that!”

“When I was a child, the newest med droid came out. My father was a bounty hunter and carried lots of weapons. He got injured taking in a wanted felon and had to go to the hospital. The droid saw the shade of his scales, recognized the type of weapons he had on, and determined him ‘Trandoshan.’ It pulled up Trandoshan scans and performed a surgery meant for Trandoshans on a Rodian. My father did not survive. I’m not saying this for pity,” Suffee said, locking eyes with Kristoff. “Droids aren’t people.” He nodded at the main terminal. “They aren’t even up to Friday's AI. They can’t think and learn the way we can.”

“But-” Tony began, the fact that he was Iron Man on the tip of his tongue.

“What if it was Gis?” Suffee turned his eyes on him and Tony found himself unable to speak. Dragging Gis into this was a low blow, and Suffee knew it. But...what if it was Gis? Interpreting his silence as agreement, Suffee finished, “Accidents happen. Gis could be walking down the alley next door when the Droid burns another shop. What if an engine explodes, sending fragments of a ripped pipe flying at hundreds of miles per hour? What if one of them nicks a major artery? It may not be the Droid’s fault, but accidents happen and people die.”

“Now hold on,” Kristoff said, raising a hand. “Are you saying that Red Droid should be stopped? Sorry, Iron Man,” he corrected himself. “It’s doing a good thing. Freeing slaves, casting down evil slavers, that’s a good thing!”

“I’m not denying that it’s helping people,” Suffee said, crossing his arms. “I’m saying that someone could get injured.”

“So make sure Gis isn’t wandering around slaveholders and we’ll be fine,” Kristoff said, rolling his eyes. “I don’t see what’s so hard about that.”

“Leave Gis out of this,” Tony said, barely keeping himself from snarling. He couldn’t help it - with Kristoff’s increasingly contestable loyalties and his callousness to Gis’s wellbeing, Tony was
starting to think-

“Fine, make sure Hoviv isn’t out there trying to pickpocket another slaver,” Kristoff said sarcastically. “That better?”

“Excuse me?” Tony glared, standing up. Kristoff rose to his full height, several inches taller than Tony. For his part, Tony couldn’t help but feel as if he was standing up to Captain America again, Rogers using his height to try to intimidate him. Well, that wasn’t going to work.

“Sit down,” Suffee demanded. Tony eyed Kristoff, refusing to sit down first. Showing weakness to Rogers was how it all started, back on Earth. It wasn’t going to happen again. “Come on, work with me. This isn’t about Gis or Hoviv. This is about everyone on the crew. It could be anyone, not just the kids,” Suffee said in rapidfire.

“Like they’re the only ones that matter,” Kristoff scoffed. “This is bigger than any of us! What about the slaves? There’s millions of them on the planet, billions in the sector, trillions in the galaxy! And here you’re just making it all about this one little-bitty Trandoshan,” Kristoff mocked.

“I said, leave him out of this,” Tony said dangerously.

“Eeep!” Galee squeaked, rushing out of the room and leaving the stations completely unattended. Even though FRIDAY was technically manning all the stations, it was a bad habit that had to be broken. Tony resolved to remind the entire crew about that in their next ship meeting even as he and Kristoff slowly advanced on each other.

“Look at the bigger picture!” Kristoff said, lifting his arms up. And how didn’t Tony see this before? Tall, buff, and hazel-eyed, Kristoff could’ve been Roger’s cousin. Not to mention his tendency to talk with actions, his fists-

“The big picture is that the two of you are having some prehistoric caveman ritual. Step back- Just stand down until we can think clearly like civilized-” Suffee started loudly, tipping the scales to Tony’s fight-or-flight mechanism.

“Are you saying you don’t care if Gis gets hurt?” Tony asked lowly.

“He’s just one life in the galaxy, and if he’s stupid or bloodthirsty enough to walk towards an obvious fight-”

“Hey!” Suffee shouted, slamming his hands on the terminal.

“What’s your problem?” Tony asked, balling his hands, only narrowly stopping himself from reaching over and shoving the taller man. Rogers was the type of leader to resort to his fists, but Tony wasn’t like that. He could talk things out, fight with words. He wasn’t like that.

“My problem is that you’d let a hundred people die to save one person!” In other words, like Rogers, not caring that a bridge was collapsing around him, only focused on his dear Bucky. Tony knew that he could do morally questionable things, at times, but he would never hurt an innocent. “Sometimes, I think that you’re just like them, like those monsters that-”

Tony saw red. He drew his fist back and let it fly. At the same time, Kristoff, snatched his thermos off the console and brought it down on Tony with both hands, like a hammer… or a shield.

Suffee was between them in an instant, shoving them both away before either of them could land a hit but stumbling back due to the force needed to perform such an action. Hot soup spilled over the lip of the container and poured a maroon trail over Suffee’s shoulder and onto the floor. Tony
didn’t see what happened, but there was a muffled crack. “Oh!” Suffee gasped out.

Hearing the pain in the Rodian’s voice and seeing him draw his hand close to his chest, Tony jerked back, turning away from Kristoff. “Are you okay? Suff’?”

At the same time, Kristoff asked, “What’s wrong?”


“Suffee?” Tony asked, taking a step forward. Suffee drew away.

“Sorry,” Kristoff muttered, hunching slightly. He dug his pockets and pulled out a crumpled napkin that he offered to Suffee.

Unsurprisingly, Suffee did not reach for it. “I need to get to the med bay,” Suffee said shortly, cradling his hand closer to himself, inadvertently hiding it from view.

“Suff’?” Tony asked quietly. “Suff’, I’m sorry. I-”

“Tony, go order your supplies. Everything you came to Ryloth to get, just get it now,” Suffee ordered, not meeting his eyes. “Kristoff, just… just go.”

“I-”

“None of us are in a good state of mind to be talking to each other, so let’s just not. We are going to cool down. We will leave the planet and talk things through like adults, okay?”

“How bad is it?” Tony asked. “I heard something break. I-”

Suffee closed his eyes again, turning his face away. “Enough. It’s just…” Suffee shook his head. “I am very disappointed in the two of you. We will have a talk about this later. All of us.” He pinned Kristoff with a look, then spun on his heel and left.

From the hallway, Galee, Greer, and Kovlo glanced between the two humans and the departing Rodian but declined to go into the room, slowly scattering. Kristoff left without a backwards glance, leaving Tony alone in the darkened room.

Chapter End Notes

The way Suffee’s father died? Here’s a true story about programming: once, a group of programmers wrote an algorithm/code-thing to tell wolves from dogs. It looked at a picture of a husky (at least, I think it was a husky) and decided that it was a wolf. The programmers searched the code to see what went wrong. It wasn’t because of the husky’s more wolfish features (compared to other dogs, at least), so why? Well, the algorithm completely ignored the dog itself, only seeing the snow in the background. It noted that pretty much all pictures of wolves had snow and determined that the animal therefore had to be a wolf. If a real algorithm does that, why can’t a fictional one be like, ‘Scales, muscles, Trandoshan coloring, lots of weapons… Eh, must be a Trandoshan’?

I think that covers everything? Tell me if I missed some explanation, and I’ll add it
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Stuff happens

Chapter Notes

Sorry for not updating last week, but I said I wouldn't in my profile page, where I tell when everything is going to be updated, so I guess that's fine? I feel guilty. I should do something nice for you guys, shouldn't I? First two requests, you vs. Fanfiction, I'll do them. In a separate story or something, so it doesn't interrupt this story, but I'll do any request. 'Cept romance. I don't do mushy-gushy stuff. Or stuff that... you know. Stuff. If I have to skip over the first request, I'll go to the next. Give me a chance to earn your forgiveness. I know a lot of you just want to get on with the story, so you can skip this next part, but if any of you want to help a fellow citizen of the universe, please read the rest of the AN:

My bio degree hit a wall because I can't do chemistry to save my life (didn't know I had to do chem for a biology degree when I signed up. Whoops). Do you think I can make enough money to survive with a part-time job editing and maybe writing original stories on the side for extra money, or do you think hiring a bunch of chemistry tutors would be better? I need 54 credits to gain an English degree right now, the same amount I need for biology. I have to retake two chemistry courses, then start on 4 more if I continue with the bio degree, and I'm starting to get scared. I had ideas and plans, but I don't know what to do now.

I'm scared. I had an outline for my life - I wanted to volunteer and help animals and people and DO stuff, but now the map is all empty because I just CAN'T do it, and I'm all alone with no friends to help me decide. My parents are upset. They expected more. My brother won't help me. Everything I built is falling apart. Like dominos. Or a sandcastle too close to the waves. I don't know why I wrote that. It's a nice image, but it takes away from this message. ignore it. I don't know what to do. I know that most people make it by when they graduate, but what if I'm on of the few that don't? I know I'm a bit odd, and I'm a minority, and some people reject hiring people of my ethnicity because they think we're stealing jobs from 'real' citizens. Please help. I'm scared.

That last part of the message sounds really bad, but I'm going to post it. It's close to five in the morning and I need to sleep. I'll delete it or edit it or censor it tomorrow when I wake up, if my nerves fail me. I really need the advice, though. If you're too shy, you can PM me on Fanfiction. Or /something/. Goodnight, friends - can I call you friends, or is it unsafe to have internet 'friends'?

See the end of the chapter for more notes
They would be landing on Kristoff’s chosen destination in another couple hours; FRIDAY had gone through the pre-landing protocols with Galee and Greer, a valuable learning experience. Tony was planning on tailing Kristoff through the planet to see what exactly he wanted with the barren planet. On the bright side, though, there was also a strong slave presence on this planet, enough for Iron Man to show his faceplate without many questions.

Tony knew the crew was a bit thrown off by the new chasm between their captain and their unofficial third-in-command, but Tony didn’t tell them much, just that it was a little miscommunication. Every time he had to repeat that, he made sure to look up and meet Kristoff squarely in the eyes. Tony was not going to be explaining this one.

At the moment though, he and Kristoff were taking turns ignoring each other. FRIDAY showed him the clips - whenever he was about to finally confront Kristoff but backed off, Kristoff would attempt to talk to him... only to retreat. Last he heard, Gis and Hoviv were making a video, which Kovlo and Suffee were very invested in.

The only reason Tony wasn’t taking initiative and talking to Kristoff was because it was amusing the crew, good for morale. It certainly not because he was running away from the inevitable fight. Definitely not.

--

With the Iron Man armor in stealth mode, Tony dropped off Fixit inside the slave’s quarters. The med droid would do his job. Tony would drop in in another hour, once night had fallen. He could almost sense the chaos he would cause, feel the fires licking the armor.

Right now, he looped around, using Kristoff’s earpiece to triangulate his general location. He headed towards the city, expecting Kristoff to be at some bar or the other, only to have to do a U-turn that would’ve been illegal by so many Earth laws; He just passed over Kristoff.

“Friday, what’s he doing here?” Tony hissed, despite the fact that Kristoff wouldn’t be able to hear him even if he spoke at normal volume. FRIDAY didn’t answer, still annoyed with him. “Nice to know you’ve got my back,” Tony said sarcastically.

“My apologies, boss. I do not know what Kristofferson Solo is doing on the premises,” FRIDAY stated primly.

Tony grimaced at the stiff formality but didn’t contest it. He kind of deserved it. Instead, Tony flew higher, so high that anyone who saw Iron Man would dismiss him as some sort of surveying drone. His vision blurred, then crystallized as FRIDAY obligingly zoomed in. He could see the nervous way Kristoff’s eyes darted from the overseers to the high, clay fences and the way he slouched as the guards walked past him, bumping shoulders with him roughly. A slave who was carrying a delicate bundle swathed in satin stopped short as she caught sight of Kristoff. Tony swooped lower to change his angle and get a better view, just in time to see Kristoff and the much older human slave exchange desperate, imploring looks.

He wasn’t sure who moved first, but the woman shifted her burden to one arm, reaching her free hand to Kristoff, who moved too. They grasped each other’s forearms tightly, only letting go once a passing guard shouted at them, marching over to shove the woman, who dropped the bundle. Kristoff caught it and glared hotly at the guard, saying something.

As the woman cowered and scurried away without a second glance, the guard raised his blaster to
strike Kristoff. Tony readied himself to dive and blast the blaster away, only to be stopped by FRIDAY. “Friday?”

“He is in no danger,” FRIDAY said simply. Tony quickly turned his attention back to Kristoff and the guard, just in time to see Kristoff use his forearm to deflect the blow off to the side. He did a fancy-looking move that Galee had taught them (“One of the few useful things my father taught me,” Galee had admitted, shamefaced), pinning the blaster between them in a move that made it very dangerous for the guard to fire, and glared. They exchanged a few terse words, and the guard sneered, leading him to the main palace.

“Palace of Ziro the Hutt,” FRIDAY informed him.

“What does Kristoff want with a Hutt?” Tony mused. “Friday privately open the communication link. One-sided.”

“That’s an invasion of privacy, boss,” FRIDAY said, after a moment. She opened it anyways.

“Lord Ziro,” said a deep voice that Tony assumed belonged to the guard, “a visitor for you.”

A string of Huttese followed, that FRIDAY quickly translated. “Ziro greeted him and invited him to ‘labor the mines.’”

“Labor the mines” Tony repeated, nonplussed, as Kristoff responded with a string of Huttese.

“I’m doing my best, okay? It’s not like all dialects are the same!” FRIDAY complained in the silence that followed.

“It’s okay, baby girl. Just wanted to make sure,” Tony reassured her, wishing she had a physical body, like Vision. In moments like these, there was nothing he wanted to do more than hug his little girl. There was only so much you could convey with a voice. Words could be twisted - Tony knew that without question. Body language, though harder to decipher, was much harder to lie with, once you did. Even Romanoff found it hard to lie, once she told her, reverting to a completely closed and unreadable stance.

FRIDAY was quiet, even as Kristoff and Ziro seemed to exchange heated words. It sounded like an argument, but it could’ve been friendly banter, for all he knew. It would be so much easier if he could see them. “Mr. Solo is insulting the state of the walls. Ziro says it’s because Mr. Solo isn’t in charge of the premises and is offering to buy him at a reasonable price.”

“And Kristoff said no, right?” Tony asked, worried. It wasn’t just that Kristoff was a brilliant pilot and that slavery was wrong. Shady past and disagreements aside, Kristoff was a pretty fun guy to hang around. Just because he didn’t trust him didn’t mean that Tony didn’t care about the ex-smuggler. Tony was a businessman. He could work with someone for a better good, even if he didn’t trust them as far as he could throw them.

“Mr. Solo is presently cursing him out,” FRIDAY answered. Tony listened to the harsh string of Huttese, or, more specifically, the intonation. Yeah, Kristoff was swearing. Despite himself, Tony felt relieved. For a moment, he had been worried that he was the cause of this visit, that Kristoff hated him and would rather work in a desert than spend another minute with him. Irrational, yes, but Tony was a tech-person, not a people-person. Tech was easy. Put stuff together, and it either works or fails. People? People were unpredictable.

Turning his attention back to the sounds coming from Iron Man’s built-in speakers, Tony mouthed the syllables, intent on learning the words. He had already learned several of the most insulting
Dosh, Rodian, and Twi’leki terms and phrases, but he had a feeling that Huttese was even more crass. Absently, he opened a browser and looked up ‘Ziro.’ “Ew,” Tony deadpanned at the overgrown slug that appeared inches from his face. It gave him ideas that were totally worth following up on.

“Ziro is not considered physically appealing, not even to his own race,” FRIDAY supplied freely.

“Physically? Are you saying that he has redeeming qualities somewhere deep inside…” Tony peered at the picture again, unable to figure out what Hutts were. “…that?” he ended up using. “Does he hug kittens on his free time or something?”

“Ziro is rather wealthy, in Hutt terms.”

Hutts were very… focused… on money, so that meant that Zero was richer than 98% of Coruscant, at the very least. Tony whistled lowly. “Okay, then. We’re done here. Everything’s fine. Let’s get out. Where is Fixit? We ready to blow that palace up? The one that we put Fixit in, not this one of course. Kristina’s in here, and we can’t blow him up. Suffee would have a stroke.”

“Boss? Are we going to leave Kristoff to fend on his own?”

Did Kristoff need help? Not only was he a capable brawler that could nearly go toe-to-toe with Barton, but he also had several Stark guns with him. They weren’t SI blasters - SI didn’t make weapons - but Tony had slaved over those. Besides, differences aside, he’d call if he was in trouble, right? Tony shook his head. “Kristoff would paint the armor pink if he realized I was literally hovering over him.”

“No, he wouldn’t,” FRIDAY pointed out calmly.

Right. He wanted to shoot the armor down and create replicas. “I guess he wouldn’t,” Tony answered FRIDAY, disquiet. “Cut transmissions.”

“Boss? Are you sure? Don’t you want to know what’s going on? Maybe, if you listened, you could…”

“Nah, it’s an ‘invasion of privacy,’ isn’t it?” Tony said, smirking, before his smile turned more genuine. “Maybe, if I trusted him more, he’ll trust me more. Besides, I know you’re listening in on him! You’ll tell me if he tries to sell Fixit!”

“Boss, you were ripped off. Fixit has an aggressive streak that would scare most buyers off. In fact, Gis and Hoviv have been getting into forty-six percent less fights since his introduction to the crew because they don’t want to be in the same room as him,” FRIDAY deadpanned.

“Exactly!” Tony said, ignoring the second part of FRIDAY’s analysis. “He’s lonely! The little baby depends on us to keep him safe. Fri, stop talking before you convince me that Fixie needs a hug!”

“Fixit would probably cut your fingers off if you come near him,” FRIDAY warned him. Tony couldn’t tell if she thought he was serious about hugging the little droid. She had been getting harder and harder to read, these days. She was becoming her own person, and Tony couldn’t tell if that scared him or not.

The days of FRITRON fears were over, but this was a completely different fear. He knew he wasn’t a good person. He had flaws and used words like knives. If he didn’t have Extremis, he would be drunk on a monthly basis. Not to mention all the harm he had caused with his Merchant of Death, weapon-building days and the ULTRON fiasco. No, Tony was sure he’d rank on the
bottom ten percent of the world. If FRIDAY decided she wanted to leave, to get lost in the HoloNet or latch onto someone new, he wouldn’t stop her. FRIDAY deserved better than the controlling, destructive screw-up he was.

The little graph on the right side of his visor displaying his heart rate rose and fell wildly, but neither Tony nor FRIDAY commented. “Because he likes me so much, he wants to keep a piece of me with him, forever and always,” Tony claimed.

“How utterly morbid, sir,” FRIDAY drawled, sounding stunningly like JARVIS. Tony had a moment where he swore his heart missed a beat. “I’m sure that your tendency to grow back stray digits would convince him that…..” Tony had the impression that she was waiting to tell him off. She grew quiet and stopped, though, much meeker than she started off. Static spluttered for a moment, and Tony realized that that she had spotted the fluctuation of his heartbeat. “Boss…”

“It’s fine, Fri,” Tony said automatically, starting to ascend. “Up, up, and away! Time to save the damsels in distress.”

The thought was still nagging at him, though. Tony couldn’t resist. “Hey, if I toss some salt on him, do you think the Hutt will shrivel up like a bug?”

--

Tony wasn’t sure how they caught sight of him this time. At least there were no photos, or worse - a video. All the slaves were removed from the premises and sworn into secrecy. An EMP and some hacking removed whatever cameras and electronic surveillance there might be. And lastly, the place was set on fire to remove fingerprints and any oddly droid-like footprints that might be left. Not the whole place, of course. Just the slave quarters, some unoccupied buildings and the walls.

It was a bit ridiculous to think that pinkie-swears would prevent a rescued slave from blabbing to the news that ‘Red Droid’ had saved them, but Tony had faith that even if their morality didn’t prevent them from speaking out, then at least their gratefulness at being freed would hold their tongue for at least a couple more days. Of course, that was when his shoddy understanding of human beings went wrong. Not even four hours-!

Tony groaned and turned away from the article that was being churned out to all of the planet’s news establishments. By morning, half of the Republic would know, and that meant that Suffee definitely would. If he wasn’t hiding the fact that he was Iron Man, he would’ve definitely put Suffee or Galee on PR. Those two somehow knew the news the moment it was released.

Light danced across the room as Tony fiddled with a hologram of the StarkPhone he put on the market. The sales were… disturbingly low. In fact, it was a total flop. Barely over a hundred were sold. He would have to go back on Alderaan and investigate, but the other inventions were doing mildly better. He could delay his trip for a bit more.

The other inventions that he was making ranged from filters to cleaners. They were aimed at Outer Rim planets, so sales weren’t expected to be large. Most of them were variants of water filters, ones aimed at watery worlds and desert planets. The one for the desert planet was to be installed in the sewers, processing the drainage systems from the bathroom and making it safe to drink, a recycling system, if you will.

Tony absentmindedly flicked on his earpiece. “Greer? Gal? Kov? Any of you there? If you get this, please head down to the workshop. Thanks.”
“Yes, sir!” Greer snapped off right away, in a way that should be delivered with a salute.

Before Tony could say a jibe about it, he heard another voice. “I go-”

“Wha- No, Gis. You should be sleeping. Don’t make me walk the four steps it takes to get to the quarters and check if you’re actually in there!” Tony threatened. He heard Hoviv’s hushed whispers and knew that the Saurin was somewhere on the middle level of the ship, causing mischief with his part-time enemy. Tony heard an affirmative squeak from Galee before he switched off. No need to see if Kovlo was coming too - two people was more than enough for his purposes.

Tony’s enhanced senses heard vibrations coming closer, but they stopped right outside the doors to the workshop, as if the person was waiting for the others. It made him hesitate for a moment. Surely he wasn’t that intimidating? He had spent the most time with FRIDAY, Gis, Suffee, and Kristoff, but surely that didn’t mean that the rest of the crew saw him as unreachable… right?

Two other sets of footsteps made their way to the door. It opened, and the three came in together. His crew members looked around the workshop in awe, and that made Tony realize that they had never been in this particular room before. While Galee spent a fair amount of time in the bridge sending transmissions and contacting her friends and had to walk past the workshop multiple times every day, the doors were always closed for safety, so she never had a glimpse. Greer was too restrained and by-the-book to enjoy inventing, and Kovlo preferred to make cakes instead of gadgets.

Okay, getting a workshop may have been bad for his social skills, and Tony resolved to invite them down more. “What do you think of this?” he asked instead, sending the hologram spinning to them. It split into three, one in front of each.

Tony watched their faces as FRIDAY ran through the functions with them. Galee looked excited - why wouldn’t she be? However, Kovlo seemed to be faking his enthusiasm for Tony’s sake, while Greer just looked confused.

“Can I have one?” Galee said, interrupting FRIDAY’s presentation. Tony gave a nod and turned to the other two.

Kovlo shook his head. “I don’t need one. It looks expensive,” he said as an excuse.

“But what do you think of it?” Tony asked.

“My… my shift starts soon. I must be there for it!” Kovlo said hastily, exiting the room.

“I don’t see the use,” Greer said bluntly as Galee pouted. “Though this can reach other planets in the same sector, most people only have friends on the same planet as themselves, and comlinks are suitable for that purpose.”

“But for those who have contacts on other planets?” Tony prompted.

“Terminals,” Greer said. “On most planets, even if you’re not part of a rich household, you can gain access at a library. And those poorer households have more to worry about than buying than a ‘StarkPhone.’”

“Thank you for your opinion,” Tony said watching a lick of fear flicker on Greer’s face before it became blank. “I really appreciate it,” Tony finished, watching Greer’s eyes widen before returning to normal. Greer gave a nod and walked out, Galee trailing after him. Tony watched them go before opening a transmission to Prestor Organa. He was surprised when it was picked up -
wasn’t it nighttime there?
“Yes?” the Viceroy asked, raising an impetuous eyebrow. Behind him, the woman Tony assumed was his wife crossed her arms, the same expression mimicking itself on her face. From their robes, Tony deduced that it was nighttime, and that he had interrupted them with his transmission.

“I know you have a lot on your plate, but I was wondering if you could pencil—” Tony winced at the foreign English term that slipped in. “—in some time for me? Fifteen minutes? Ten, even? I’d like to have a quick meeting with you.”

“I always have time for friends,” Prestor replied warmly. Tony was stunned - friends? He just happened to be someone who met with the guy about three times. Catching the surprise, Prestor leaned forward, lean frame filling the screen. “You saved my life at the risk of your own. Did you think that I would be so cold as to classify you as a mere acquaintance? I may not be as foolish as to label you as one of my trusted confidants, but you have more than proved yourself,” Prestor said shrewdly.

Tony considered it. ‘Businessman’ may not be the same as ‘politician,’ but there was a reason both were called sharks. “Thank you,” Tony said with a nod.

Prestor glanced behind himself and turned back to Tony. “Excellent,” he said briskly. “My assistant will send you available times. I must be going, now.” WIthout fanfare, the transmission cut off.

--

Checking the trackers in the earpieces, Tony made sure that none of the kids were in the vents or listening in on the conference. The younger Aleenas were somewhere in the walls of the cafeteria, while FRIDAY had Gis and Hoviv doing a ‘project’ in the workshop. As long as it did not backfire on him, Tony didn't mind the two teens doing... whatever they were doing.

When Tony walked onto the bridge for Suffee’s emergency meeting, he didn’t expect to see the transmission floating above the main terminal.

#RedDroid #RedDroidStrikesAgain

Got no images, but Red Droid was on my planet!

[Site correction: #IronMan / #IronManStrikesAgain / Iron Man]

Tony zeroed in on the notification at the bottom and watched as all the mentions of “Red Droid” turned into “Iron Man.” He had an idea of who was responsible for that. He wondered if he should congratulate and thank FRIDAY or scold her. Honestly, Tony hated the name more than she did, but too strong of a stance and someone might figure out his identity.

He turned to the table and grimaced as he noticed how Suffee had directed everyone into separate seats. He already knew what they were talking about - his seat was opposite of Kristoff’s, the furthest Suffee could manage to put them around the circular terminal. “Glad everyone made it,” the aforementioned Rodian said. Tony turned his attention to Suffee. “The Red Droid—”

“Iron Man,” FRIDAY corrected.

Suffee sent a chilling gaze towards the camera, but Tony knew that FRIDAY was undeterred. She got it from her father. “As I was saying, the… Iron Man… has, for some reason, attacked a palace that uses slaves, not a hundred miles from here.”
“You just named the reason,” Kristoff pointed out. “That palace uses slaves.”

“And the chances that it appeared at our last stop too? There are thousands of planets that have slave presence. It is following us,” Suffee said grimly. Kristoff started and sat up, while the Aleenas started muttering among themselves.

“Is there a chance that there is two of the droids?” Galee asked.

"Iron Man,” Borr corrected with a toothy grin.

“Does it matter?” Shoragg answered. “There was one there and there is one here. I say we make a stand and show it we are not going to-”

“Hey! It’s freeing slaves. Are you saying you support the regime?” Kristoff accused.

“Excuse me?” Shoragg growled as Tony opened his mouth to either break up the argument or draw all the attention to himself and away from Shoragg.

“It’s freeing slaves and you’re saying we should destroy it,” Kristoff recounted icily. “You sound oddly like a sympathizer to me.” Tony paused in interest as Kristoff turned on Shoragg as readily as he did on Tony in that same room just two days prior.

“How dare you-” Shoragg began.

“Stop,” Suffee ordered coolly. “Shoragg wanted to make sure that the Droid does not ” he informed Kristoff before turning to Shoragg. “Control your temper. This ship has no room for hotheads. You must put up a better example... for your son.”

It was a low blow, but Suffee’s tone softened in the end to make it more bearable to the other Rodian. It had an immediate effect on Shoragg, who seemed to grow smaller as all the fight left him. “Yes ma’am,” Shoragg said, chastened. He slumped down on his ship.

“And you.” Tony looked back at Suffee to find that he was looking at him. “Are you going to stand for this? Two crewmates all but attacking each other before your eyes?” Suffee demanded.

Eyes widening, Tony cringed and ducked his head. “Sorry!” he blurted. “New at this! Rookie of the year, captain-in-training and all that. I know, I know, I’m irresponsible! I’ll do better. Next time. Promise.”

Suffee eyed him as the rest of the crew kept quiet to avoid the Rodian’s ire. Tony looked down as Suffee’s mouth opened and closed before tightening in indecision. “I was going to yell at you, but i’m starting to think that you can lecture yourself better than I can,” Suffee admitted after a long, awkward moment.

“I had terrible role models,” Tony said blithely, trying to get them to forget his moment of weakness. “My last leader and the rest of our team kind of just stood around while our... Force-enhanced teammate kind of held me up by the neck. Don’t worry; I know that’s wrong. I’d step in if Kristy and Shoragg actually started fighting.”

Dead silence.

Galee slowly raised a hand. “Is it too late to vote for Suffee as our leader?” she asked cautiously.

“Yes,” Suffee said crisply. “Next question?”
“A Force-sensitive teammate strangled you?” Shoragg demanded.

“You make it sound bad,” Tony said, realizing that his attempt at a diversion horribly backfired. “And he wasn’t actually in touch with the Force. At least I don’t think so. He can just do things that no one else can.”

“And that matters how?” Kristoff all but snarled.

“Tony, don’t take this the wrong way, but I don’t think there’s any way of making this sound good,” Suffee interjected seriously.

“I deserved it. I made a mistake that nearly destroyed my planet!” Tony yelled.

“And that makes everything okay? They could’ve killed you!”

“That isn’t how a team works, Tony. We’re not like them, and I’m insulted you think so.”

“This explains so much. Stark should not be the captain of this ship. I nominate Suffee.”

“-sign you up for a leadership course.”

“-tearing this team apart. No one-”

“-full faith in Tony. He hasn’t led us wrong y-”

“-Rodian. Or even Trandoshan. Can you believe-”

“Enough.” Suffee stood up. “The meeting is over. We will reconvene in twenty-four hours.”

Even as he spotted Kristoff coming forward to help him carry the materials to the workshop, Tony called out, “Hey, Bai-Gon, mind giving me a hand?”

“Sure, boss,” Bai-Gon said, sighing exaggeratedly. He eyed Kristoff with suspicion when he noticed the human in the general proximity, making a confused gesture towards the crate.

“Uh, no, it’s fine. You can do it,” Kristoff said, hastily retreating. Bai-Gon turned his wary gaze to Tony, who busied himself pretending to concentrate on reading the labels.

A flash of light catching onto metal buttons had Tony looking up as he and Bai-Gon painstakingly moved crate after crate to the workshop. Looking up, Tony noticed Suffee looking in the direction Kristoff had wandered off in. Giving him an exasperated point after Kristoff, Suffee pushed away from the window and walked in that direction. He frowned worriedly, realizing that Suffee hadn’t been outside the ship in a while. Tony personally thought he should stick close to the windows any time they were near a star - some sunlight would do him good.

“Hey, mind if I…?” Tony asked Bai-Gon, waving at Suffee’s retreating back.

“Go,” Bai-Gon said dismissively. “Yeah, just leave me alone with all these wooden coffins to carry. And fix whatever lover’s spat happened between you two!” Bai-Gon yelled after him, looking over as his cousin came over to help him carry the crate.

Tony rolled his eyes and didn’t respond. He caught up with Suffee, who didn’t pause to glance at him. “He’s right, you know,” Suffee said, keeping his eyes fixed forward. “Whatever happened back at the warehouse is affecting team dynamics.”
Defensively, Tony said, “It’s not my fault.” He noticed that Suffee had avoided mention of what happened in the bridge and couldn’t help his eyes from guiltily darting to the Rodian’s wrapped wrist. It wasn’t in a real cast, so there was that.

“I never said it was,” Suffee told him. He turned and leaned against the wall. “Do I have to dismiss Solo from the crew?”

“What?” Tony asked, flabbergasted.

“You said it was not your fault. Therefore, you believe that whatever happened was Kristoff’s fault. It was not an accident, because you forgive those almost immediately, so it was intentional on Kristoff’s part. He has neither explained himself nor has he apologized since then,” Suffee deducted. “You’re the captain, and despite what you say, the most important part of the crew. So I ask you this; is it serious enough to dismiss Solo from the crew?”

“You believe me?” Tony asked, still stuck on that train of thought. Even while not knowing the full story, despite the reasoning due to chain of command, Suffee was standing by him. Even if it was marginal, it was still touching. Had anyone ever done that for him? Definitely not in recent years.

“You haven’t lied to me yet,” Suffee said neutrally. “Though I’d very much like to hear Kristoff’s side of the story before I make a permanent decision. You should too.”

“And now I’m interested,” Tony said, turning fully to face Suffee. “How did you come to that conclusion? Force-sensitive?” Tony asked.

“Don’t worry, I’m told that I’m naturally more perceptive than most. It just seems to me that you’re not sure what to think. You didn’t bar Kristoff from any part of the ship, not even the workshop, nor did you lower his rank from the third-in-command-”

“Second,” Tony said automatically.

Suffee leveled a look at him. “Like it or not, we are not equal in this regard. I may take over most of the administrative processes of running the ship, but make no mistake; you are the captain.” It seemed like the tables have turned. Back on Earth, he had ran the paperwork - providing the necessities, writing the paychecks, running PR, even dealing with the political ramifications of taking the team into foreign countries. When did he stop doing that? Rogers had led the team back then, but now it was Tony running the crew, while Suffee was stuck with administrative duties.

Tony froze up at that. It was the second time a teammate inadvertently compared him to Rogers. He didn’t want to be like Rogers. “Are you happy?”

Suffee looked mildly surprised. “Happy?”

“Do you like doing that? I can take over that part if you want me to. I can deal with it. You don’t have to-”

“I don’t mind,” Suffee said, that mild look still on his face. “How did you come to that conclusion?”

Tony paused. “I don’t want to be the bad guy, here,” he admitted.

“Then don’t,” Suffee said. “You’re a good person, Tony, even if you like to cast yourself as the villain. Maybe it’s that you’re not even sure what happened, because it doesn’t seem to me like you know what to be angry about. So go talk to him. Straighten things out. It’s surprising what can be resolved if people just talked. If people just listened.”
It was true. If he had stopped to hear Rogers at the airport, would Siberia still happen? If he had stepped outside after watching the video, cooled down a bit… Would they have still been a team?

But…

Suffee said he casted himself as the villain.

If Rogers just decided to stop and listen at the airport, a lot could’ve been avoided. But… that wasn’t the real problem, was it? If he actually read the Accords, listened to what the people were trying to tell him… No, that wasn’t it. The problem was even further. If Rogers had just told him the truth about his parents-

Stop.

Don’t think of that.

Maybe…

Maybe it was time to stop blaming himself and let things go. They had both made mistakes, and while he may be of the opinion that Rogers had made the bigger mistake and wouldn’t be trusting the idiot anytime soon, it was time to let the past stay in the past. It wasn’t fair to Kristoff that Tony was painting the guy with the same brush as Mr. Red-White-and-Blue. After all, Tony wouldn’t like to be put on the same magazine page as Stane.

“Okay,” Tony said after a moment.

For the first time since they had met, Suffee showed a flicker of surprise, a quick widening of the eyes that immediately smoothed itself out. “Okay?” he repeated. “That’s it?”

“Okay, I’ll ask him what the kriff he was thinking,” Tony clarified with a firm nod. A shot of fear made him falter. “Just… not now,” Tony amended. If Kristoff really betrayed him, had chosen another friend over Tony, Tony didn’t want to hear it just yet. He wanted to pretend everything was alright, just for a little while longer. “I’ll give him another week. If he doesn’t tell me, I’ll confront him then.” Tony gave Suffee an uneasy smile and headed for his refuge. Some time in the workshop would do him some good.

“Don’t be too upset,” he heard Suffee say quietly, when he was almost out of earshot. The only reason he heard the Rodian was due to Extremis. “We all have secrets of our own, and that’s okay. As long as they don’t hurt anyone, it’s okay.”

Heart pounding, Tony spun around to look at Suffee, who tilted his head for a long moment, regarding him. Did the Rodian know about his nighttime activities? No, wait - that sounded wrong.

Then, unexpectedly, Suffee smiled and inclined his head. The Rodian turned on his heel and left.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Oh! Well, this is... embarrassing! I haven't checked my accounts and inboxes for almost four weeks... I typed up chapter 15, only to log on and find out what happened to my deleted scenes - I apparently smushed them all into chapter 15 and posted it last week? I don't remember doing it - was stressed and sleep-deprived. Had all these hallucinations - there were people in my room, just watching me from the corners, a kid with a missing face crawled out from under my desk, and I kept hearing my dad sing an old lullaby in our native tongue when I went inside dark rooms. Needless to say, I don't remember typing last chapter. Either I somehow sleep-edited it (Not surprising - I somehow sleep-attended my parent's New Year's party...) or I did it consciously, but my mind wasn't working well enough to remember what was in it / that I even did it. It has surprisingly few grammatical errors for something done while I was out of my head, though. Glad that crazy-me is still a grammar Nazi so I didn't have to go back and fix that much.

That AN at the beginning, though? Embarrassing. You guys aren't supposed to see that side of me. I'd delete it, but then I'd have a bunch of really out-of-place comments, if anyone bothered to read the reviews in future months. I am grateful, though. I really am. I'm glad to have you all. I didn't expect all the support. You guys really seem to care about me, and I really wish all this was real. I promise, PROMISE, I will reply to all of you, but it might take a while. It's a little hard to concentrate right now - even typing this chapter took a lot more time than it usually does.

If this chapter doesn't seem to fit in with chapter 15, that's because I didn't know chapter 15 existed and had to hack this one to pieces and rig it up to make it work. Last chapter used two deleted scenes that I was planning on putting in Sideroads, though, yeah, the discussion was actually planned for 15, so I guess I will have to build the plot up around those. I'm not happy with this chapter, but really, when /am/ I happy? The answer's never, folks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hurry up, guys. I need to be on Alderaan in…” Tony glanced at the clock “four hours, and you know how long it takes to get through customs. Hey Kristy, you didn’t get banned on Alderaan while my back was turned, did you?” To be fair, it was a legitimate question. They had been barred from landing on a planet because Tony had listed ‘Kristofferson Solo’ as a crewmember. Tony had guided the Y-not into an awkward U-turn right back out of the atmosphere once they were met with a wall of peacekeeper shuttles.

Because Tony had already indicated that he was attempting the bounty and didn’t want to lose reliability, Tony was forced to call in a favor from Paramesor. After the more experienced bounty hunter sent some of his allies over to retrieve the hostage, Tony reluctantly gave them several crates of his prototype kolto, along with the full bounty. Through a private transmission, Paramesor conveyed to Tony that the Y-nauts were gaining attention. He once again offered the protection of joining his ‘group’ - House Paramesor was one of the ten major bounty hunting house. Tony declined, though a lot more slowly this time.
This incident had Tony ordering the crew to list out all the planets they had committed possible crimes on and had FRIDAY combing through the planets’ public resources to see if there was enough evidence to lock them up. Most of the crew did have warrants out for them. Interestingly, Suffee was locked out of Cantonica, or, more specifically, Canto Bight, a city known for gambling. Maybe it wasn’t surprising, considering how he ended up on Nar Shadaa.

Even more suspiciously, FRIDAY was banned on two separate planets, though she refused to answer how she managed that, seeing that she didn’t even have a physical body. She did send him on a wild goose chase by saying, “Well, you’re banned on Tynna,” though. It was mightily odd, especially because he never been on that planet, despite all the wild goose chases that bounty hunting led them on. Heck, he’d never even heard of the place. He was banned, though public records did not say why.

“We’ll be there soon,” Kovlo grumbled.

“No offense, but last time you said ‘soon,’ we ended up having to save you from quicksand… five hours later. The word ‘soon’ doesn’t quite fill me with confidence.”

“We’ll be there in twenty minutes, Captain,” Kristoff informed Tony dryly, putting an emphasis on the word. They never made a vote on who should be captain, leaving both Suffee and Tony as leaders of the group. Unofficially, Tony was the leader, though on paper, either his or Suffee’s signature would suffice. After an almost violent reaction from Tony at being called ‘Cap’ by Kristoff, the crew had uneasily spoken of having another vote. In the end though, they decided not to.

“Gotcha. We’ll be primed and ready.” Tony sat back and flicked through pilfered camera feeds. As the crew had grown more and more experienced with taking bounties, they had started going for multiple bounties at a time, dropping groups off on nearby planets and picking them up after they signaled they were done. A clear divide on the team had started to form, and Tony didn’t like that.

There were two main groups, Tony’s and Kristoff’s. Tony could always rely on the cousins to back him up. Greer usually did too, but he would always go with Galee if she went with a different group. Kovlo usually went with Kristoff. Galee went with whichever group that went to the planet with the most good-looking men, though she sometimes went off on separate missions with Charell. The rest of the team would cycle through staying on the ship or joining the easier hunts.

If they needed help, they would ask for it and the skeleton crew left on the ship would come for them. It only happened twice, but Tony worried about what would happen if two active groups needed help at the same time.

Luckily, Kristoff, Kovlo, and Charell arrived on time, covered in an unidentifiable substance. Galee watched with wide eyes and burst into giggles. Tony quickly saw why; the ‘artifact’ was oozing slime. “I don’t want to know. Put that thing in Isolation and go decontaminate yourself.”

“I don’t like this,” Suffee said to him privately over the earpiece as he piloted the Y-not into atmosphere, steering in the direction of the hyperlanes. “We don’t know what it is and what it can do. It might be dangerous.”

“Hopefully it’s not going to eat us or something. If not, I take full responsibility,” Tony said blithely, watching the object be locked away with sharp eyes, despite his casual words. “Hopefully?” Suffee echoed. “I’d like my life to hinge on something more than ‘hope.’” The words were said absentmindedly, Suffee putting most of his attention in flying the ship to Alderaan. Still, the intent remained.
Tony was glad that Suffee decided to have this conversation privately. It was the closest the rule-abiding Rodian had ever come to insubordination. “They won’t come to collect the bounty for another three standard days. If it is dangerous, unless we go to the main BH office on the other side of the galaxy, we’re the ones that are most qualified to deal with it,” Tony said grimly, watching the bubbling slime through the transparisteel.

“Sometimes, I hate your sense of honor,” Suffee admitted. Nodding halfheartedly, Tony pressed the button that made phrik-reinforced durasteel dome spiral up around the box. He indicated to FRIDAY that the room had to be monitored at all times. As he went through the decontamination process, he heard Suffee mutter under his breath, as though not meaning to say it aloud, “But I guess that if you didn’t have it, I wouldn’t have followed you.”

- Insert Quote Here -

While making the other party wait was a common business tactic to intimidate smaller corporations, Tony was in no place to do such a thing to the Viceroy of an entire planet. Furthermore, he legitimately liked the Alderaanian and thought that keeping him waiting was a poor reward for all the help Prestor had provided him with. Due to this, it was with great consternation that Tony arrived ‘fashionably late.’

“Tony,” Prestor said as Tony walked down the ramp, several of his crew trailing behind him. Tony beamed at the Viceroy, before noticing Bail, standing a good distance away from his father. There was tension in the air, as if a fight was just cut off, far from finished.

“Prestor!” Tony greeted, clasping the said man’s hand. “Or Viceroy Organa. Lord Viceroy? Kind of confused about how to address you, since you called me by my first name.”

“Prestor is fine,” the Viceroy answered.

“Prestor it is, then!” Tony agreed, not one to give up the chance to act informally. He raised an inquisitive eyebrow. “Hi, Bail.” Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted some servants stiffening in obvious affront.

“Hello, Tony. Is Friday here?” Bail said, looking over the crew. He ignored the firm look that the elder Organa sent him.

“She is as here as she always is,” Tony said mysteriously, before they were interrupted by two teenagers all but shoving Tony out of the way.

“An offering from the Lady Friday,” Hoviv announced solemnly to Bail. Beside him, Gis kneeled in front of Bail, arms outstretched to present the Alderaanian with a… Tony didn’t know what, exactly, but it was sleek, thin, and long, and completely wrapped with a luxurious cloth.

Tony was dying to ask FRIDAY what it was. The shape vaguely reminded him of one of the pranks he played on Barton. He told the archer that the ‘gift’ was a bundle of arrows, but when it was opened, Barton and his immediate surroundings - that, unfortunately for Tony, included the Black Widow - were painted pink and completely glitterfied. Whatever the prank was, Tony hoped that Gis or FRIDAY would have a recording to show him when he finished with Prestor.

“Come, we have much to discuss and not much time to do so,” Prestor told Tony, turning on his heel and strolling into the palace. With one last look at the odd trio, Tony followed. They went to a small, informal conference room. A maid darted in, placing a tray of some sort of tea and cookies onto the table before silently leaving.
“Fancy,” Tony commented, dipping a cookie into the tea.

“It appears that your daughter is wooing my son,” Prestor said instead.

“You could look at it that way,” Tony said with a shrug. Little girls and boys expressed affection by pulling pigtails, right? So maybe that meant that slightly older girls and boys would prank their crushes? Holy cow, did that mean that FRIDAY had a crush on the younger Organa? “Looks to me that your son has a crush on my daughter. I’m guessing you don’t approve?”

“It is not about whether or not I approve. It is about how any potential daughter-in-law of mine can handle being in the public eye and how she can stand up to scrutiny. My son has told me that your daughter is well-read and adaptable, but understand that court life is not for everyone,” Prestor said tactfully.

Tony knew what the Alderaanian meant; the line of succession for the position of Viceroy was uneasy at best, and he was worried about the damage that FRIDAY might bring to Bail’s chances of gaining that title. Despite the fact that he himself doubted that any potential romantic relationship between FRIDAY and… anyone, really, would work out, he felt obligated to defend his daughter. “Don’t count her out. FRIDAY’s polite and her ability to memorize proper protocol is unparalleled. Plus, she can come up with four dozen ways to say ‘kriff-you’ in politician, on the spot.”

“How amusing,” Prestor said noncommittally.

However, Tony could sense the Alderaanian’s mind whirling with glee. Bail was a polite kid, but being inoffensive never got anyone anywhere in the world of politics. Someone as sly and sneaky as FRIDAY would do the kid some good. It was nice to meet a fellow troller. Tony could already sense the H*** he, the Organas, and FRIDAY would be bringing to Alderaan’s royal court.

The edges of Prestor’s lips twitched up as he glanced at Tony and read his intentions. “Shall we continue?” he asked, gesturing at the modified data pad that Tony placed on the table between them. With an exaggerated put-upon sigh, Tony pressed a button on the side of the datapad, making holograms spring up. Prestor straightened up. “Why are those not on the products list?” he demanded.

“They are, now,” Tony bluffed, staring at the holograms.

To be honest, Tony had never thought of that. Back on Earth, he had kept that technology to himself because numbers told him that the general population couldn’t afford it, while logic told him that people didn’t trust what they couldn’t understand, and that they weren’t ready for it.

But this galaxy already had holoforms available at every major terminal. Holograms coming out of a tiny datapad wouldn’t be such a big leap. This was what Prestor was here to help him with: giving him another opinion. “Shall we continue?”

Prestor sat across from Tony, still and calm, even as Tony spat out statistics and analyzed and reanalyzed the sales. He already had an idea of where he went wrong. Action vs. Reaction. He was trying to force the universe into his mold, when the universe was as firm and unyielding as the people that made it up. The Republic already had things similar to cell phones, and they weren’t looking to change.

The cell phone idea would have to be scrapped for now. Maybe, when SI was more experienced, he could revive that idea. As it was now, he needed something else to raise SI to the heights it was in his original universe.
Games, then? Despite how advanced the galaxy was in some areas, like transportation and droids, other areas were sorely lacking. Data pads were the closest things in this galaxy to a single, portable device that held multiple games. So advertising StarkPhones as a gaming device? It was a huge downgrade from what they were used as on Earth, but it was necessary. The next generation of StarkPhones could have holograms included...

Maybe he should start working more on devices to improve life standards on the Outer Rim. At least he knew there was a demand. And maybe incorporate some of the tech into his armor...

Prestor probably didn’t understand half of what Tony was talking about, but he made a great sounding board, his inexperience with sales providing Tony a unique perspective.

Still, though there was no outward sign of it, Tony had the impression that Prestor was spending barely the amount of attention needed to be polite. While others might have been offended by this, Tony was fine with it. As the viceroy of an entire planet, Prestor had a lot more to worry about than flagging sales. Besides, he had pulled the same trick with his board members, albeit with a lot less success. At least Prestor provided him some good ideas. All he provided his board members with was headaches. That is, if you completely overlooked the billions of dollars in patents he was involved in.

“So what’s the problem?” Tony asked, before realizing how abrupt it sounded.

Prestor blinked slowly, the only outward sign that the sudden change in topic had any effect on him. “I take it we are no longer discussing planetary-distance-versus-time ratios?” he stated rather than asked warily.

“Nope. We’re talking about you and your problems!” Tony said cheerfully. “You’re distracted. Tell me what’s going on and we can take it apart like we just did with my problems!”

Placing the teacup he was holding down, Prestor looked sternly at Tony. “You understand that—”

“That these are priceless state secrets and you’ll hunt me down and have me strung and quartered if I reveal it, yep. On with the show!” Tony looked expectantly at Prestor.

The Viceroy let a loud exhale through his nose, somehow making it sound refined in a way not even Pepper had managed to make it. Alderaan was a peaceful planet, but Prestor made no mention of the relatively graphic image that Tony had provided him with. “Very well,” he said instead. “You must be wary of where you speak of this, lest it fall upon hostile ears. Even in my own household, I must watch my words. There are those who would take advantage of what I am about to reveal, those who would not care about honor, nor ideals,” he said solemnly, voice falling to something that was almost a whisper. He stared at Tony with unfathomable eyes.

“Awfully long way of saying ‘don’t talk about this to anyone,’” Tony commented, realizing Prestor expected an answer.

Tony expected a sigh, maybe a heavenward gaze in a holy request for patience. What he didn’t expect was for Prestor to let out a tiny snort, all but slumping in his chair.

It wasn’t much of a slump, true. Prestor’s shoulders slumped, and he grew about two centimeters shorter, but the Viceroy relaxed ever-so-slightly.

For the first time, Tony didn’t see an unyielding leader or an unshakeable protector. He saw a man, just as tired and fallible as he was.

He didn’t know how he had missed all the stress that his… friend… had been carrying. Tony
thought his mask was impermeable, but it seemed that Prestor’s mask was on a whole different level. Tony was touched that, out of all the people Prestor had chosen to lean on, he was even an option. Surely Prestor had to have advisors and childhood friends, people more worthy. Then, he remembered his own childhood. No, children that grew up in the spotlight didn’t quite have that opportunity.

Letting Prestor have some time to collect himself was the least he could do. Politely averting his eyes and pretending to be absorbed in some graphs, Tony sat silently as Prestor breathed deeply, eyes closed.

Gradually sinking into the numbers and blueprints, Tony fully let the inventor in him come out. There was a reason why JARVIS and FRIDAY constantly put the workshops into lockdown - his science binges were the most Tony ever let his masks come down. He was open and alive when he was in the Zone. It wasn't the vulnerability that Prestor revealed to him, but it was the closest that Tony could bear to let down his walls.

Slowly, Tony became aware of another pair of eyes on him. He set down his stylus and let the holograms fade away.

“There were two assassination attempts this year alone,” Prestor said without preamble, looking over with creased eyebrows to gauge Tony's reaction.

A rather low number, Tony thought idly. Not the best thought to have, at that moment, but it was a true one for a guy that once had to be followed around by a legion of bodyguards. He frowned and carefully regarded the other man, not sure how he was supposed to act. He didn't have many friends. If it was Rhodey, Tony would've torn the world apart. Prestor probably wouldn't appreciate that though. Not that Rhodey would've, for that matter.

When Tony met Prestor’s eyes, the Viceroy abruptly said, “Don’t tell Bail.”

“You don’t want your son to know his life is in danger?” Tony questioned.

“I know I should,” Prestor said with a shake of his head that contradicted his words, “I know that withholding information like that tends to backfire in the most spectacular ways. I know that, yet I cannot help but wish for a couple more days. I don't want him to have our legacy on his shoulders yet.”

Tony air escape from his lungs through his mouth. “He isn't a child anymore,” he pointed out. It drew up memories of how suddenly he was torn from Earth, subconsciously leading his next words. “Not telling him will put him in even more danger. Not to mention it’s breaking the trust between you. Is that the real reason behind the fight you guys both had before we got here? In a worst-case scenario, do you really want an argument to be your last memories of each other?”

Prestor flinched and looked away. Tony realized might have crossed a line and was about to apologize when Prestor spoke. “Of course. Your wisdom is sound. I will- I will tell him immediately.” He reluctantly stood up.

“Hey, wait. Sit down for a sec,” Tony said, pretending not to see Prestor's gratefulness as he sat back down. “We haven't even got to the main point of this discussion yet. What can I do to help out?”

He watched the Alderaanian mentally reviewed their conversation and stiffly nod. “I would like to request your services for a fair bounty. You have received positive reviews on both of the security systems you have set up.”
Tony paused. He had done a few security systems to help with part of some escorting bounties. They were obscure bounties, and he wasn’t sure how Prestor knew. “That monitoring-me thing you have going on is seriously creepy. So you want me to rig up something nice around what you have here? It’s doable. Nonlethal, right?” He thought of what he had seen. The camera set-up was decent, really. Maybe a couple of electrical traps, then?

“It would be highly frowned upon for the tresspassers to be murdered, not to mention the staff.”

“Please, my systems are better than that!” Tony scoffed. “If they’re meant to be there, then they won’t be killed.”

“We are a pacifist planet,” Prestor pointed out more firmly.

“Fair enough,” Tony agreed, capitulating. “Who are you defending against? Just to give me an idea of what to expect.”

Prestor tilted his head slightly, examining Tony anew. Tony resisted the urge to ask if the changed angle gave the Viceroy a new perspective of him. “Have you heard of the House of Thul?” Prestor asked with a lilting tone.

“Can’t say I have,” Tony answered.

“The House of Thul is behind the assassinations.”

“Am I going to get an explanation, or are we just going to leave it at that?” Tony asked when no other clarification was forthcoming.

“They are House Organa’s greatest rival for millenia. Since our civil war, they have been a thorn on our side, but nothing lethal.”

Tony tilted his head as FRIDAY informed him that the civil war had happened well over three thousand years ago. Long time to hold a grudge. “So all you’re going to do about it is bunker down and wait it out?”

“What do you suggest?”

“Confrontation? Violent negotiations?” Tony offered. “I can track them down and threaten them.” His new outlook on life was a side effect of a bounty-hunting life, and Tony decided he should probably fix it before it got too out-of-hand.

“You are forgetting that Alderaan is a pacifist planet. As Viceroy, I am to uphold those standards,” Prestor reminded again.

“Then I can do it for you. I’m not Alderaanian, and I have cause to investigate.”

“Cause?”

“Well, we’re friends, aren’t we?”

Prestor weighed it out. Tony could see his disdain-bordering-abhorrence for violence battling his instinctive need to protect his family. He saw the moment Prestor decided. “If there is another attempt, I will contact you about this. No trace back to House Organa,” he warned Tony.

“Gotcha. One House of murderers, coming up!” Tony agreed. The Alderaanian seemed put-out at Tony’s certainty that there would be another attempt on his family’s lives, but did not comment.
They quickly wrapped up the meeting and went back outside.

Prestor looked over at Bail, and his face softened, completely transforming. “Bail,” the elder Organa called out, voice warm. Tony looked away, feeling jealous despite himself. He had never spied Howard looking at him the way Prestor looked at Bail.

Excusing himself from Tony, Bail walked to Prestor and stopped a respectable distance away from him. “Father,” he said formally, hands clasped behind his back and head slightly bowed.

“Bail,” Prestor breathed out in a tired sigh. Despite himself, Bail looked up in concern. “Son, I’m afraid I have not been entirely honest with you.”

Bail’s nose scrunched up slightly in a variation of the universal, angsty ‘no-s***?’ look that all teenagers seemed to have perfected. “Father?” he said instead, tone nonjudgemental despite the expression on his face. His gaze flicked to Tony, who gave him a grin and a thumbs-up. Bail narrowed his eyes by a fraction, turning back to his father.

Instead of telling Bail what was going on, like Tony expected, Prestor glanced around. Tony followed his line of vision to a servant lingering at the edge of the room, moving too slowly to be doing anything but listening in. “I shall tell you on the ship,” Prestor decided.

“Do I have to go?” Bail asked, aghast. “Padme and Sabe always try to eat my jackets!”

“Interesting. Tell me more!” Tony said eagerly. Anything that put people off their toes was a good thing, in his opinion. The eating clothing thing, though... Padme and Sabe were either some sort of large animals that liked to nibble on expensive fabrics or maybe a pair of toddlers, depending on what Bail meant by ‘eat.’ Tony hoped Bail was exaggerating.

“Padme is a queen-in-training who is quite… taken with Bail. Sabe is her best friend and enabler. They are exceptionally mischievous,” Prestor answered, amused. “Yes, Bail. You have to go. You wouldn’t want to disappoint them, would you?”

Bail groaned playfully. “Maybe in a few years. Two two-year-olds are more than I can handle!”

“Well, that sounds like a queen I can get behind. I give her my full support!” Tony declared. Things would be so much easier if children ran the world. There would be less wars and people would get along, despite their beliefs or the way they looked.

- Insert Quote Here -

Security systems were second nature to Tony, after all the time he spent trying to make Happy happy. The thought made Tony snicker out loud: Happy-happy. It took almost no time to design a second system that ran parallel with the current systems yet could function independently. It took longer to install, but his crew pulled through, offering to help.

“Dad?” FRIDAY called out as Tony cracked open a false sensor to insert a pure phrik wire. This sensor would be installed in the wall at the head of Bail’s bed. No matter what he promised Prestor, any assassin that made it this close to the younger Organa would end up dead. Tony took his friends’ lives seriously, and if they were determined enough to bypass the rest of his traps, Tony would show them no mercy. In any case, FRIDAY approved.

“Yes, baby girl?” Tony answered, putting his welder down and turning his full attention to her.

“I want to have a physical representation,” FRIDAY said measuredly in a way that told Tony that she had been rehearsing it.
“Like Vision? I memorized the blueprints of the Cradle. It might need some upgrades. No half-bit vibranium for my little girl; you'll be full-on phrik,” Tony declared. A twinge of worry filled him, though, unlike what he expected, it had nothing to do with the Ultron situation. What if something like Vision happened? What if, when the body woke up, FRIDAY wouldn’t be FRIDAY anymore? And even if she was fully herself, a darker part of him asked if FRIDAY would still want to stay with a screw-up like him if she wasn’t forced to.

“No!” FRIDAY nearly shouted. “No,” she said softer, “nothing like that. Just a holoform or something. I just want to be seen.”

At her words, Tony breathed a sigh of relief. He would still be able to keep his baby girl, if only for a little longer. “Okay, a holoform emitter, with open settings, so you can change your looks when you want to. Maybe we can develop hard-light holoforms? It’d be nice to hug you, and it could be useful for disorienting people.”

“That would be nice,” FRIDAY agreed. “Hugging people sounds wonderful.”

“Hugging people? Not me, specifically?” Tony regarded the camera, eyes narrowed thoughtfully. A grin slowly formed on his face. It looked like Bail’s crush was returned. “And does this have anything to do with pretty-boy Bail? I hear you brought him some kind of souvenir...” He trailed off in a subconscious prompt for FRIDAY to speak. Not even FRIDAY could resist it, a proud testament to how utterly human she was, despite being made up of code.

“No! It doesn’t have anything to do with Bail!” FRIDAY protested.

Noting that she denied it, Tony couldn’t hold back a smile. An untruth - she really was learning, becoming more complex. The smile became a smirk. “Bail? On to first-name terms already, are we?”

“It is perfectly natural to call humans by their given name,” FRIDAY started to lecture.

“Coming from the person who still occasionally calls Kristy, ‘Mr. Solo?’ Yeah, sure.” Tony mentally calculated the statistics of how a relationship between the two could go, with Bail’s stubbornness and Friday’s obstinate… FRIDAYness. The numbers were surprisingly high. “I can’t wait to give him the shovel talk!”

“Dad...”

“I never thought I’d be able to give the shovel talk to anyone!” Tony continued with glee. “I mean, DUM-E had a crush on EVE from WALL-E, but come on! We all knew that romance wasn’t going anywhere...”

Those words softened FRIDAY. “Oh... Okay, then. Please don’t scare him away. He’s really nice. He treats me like I’m more than a voice in your ear,” FRIDAY admitted. “He treats me like... like I’m real.”

The words caught in Tony’s throat. “Fri, I’ll support you, no matter what.” He coughed and cleared his throat. “Anyways, if Bail doesn’t accept you the way you are, then he doesn't deserve you.”

“Thanks, dad,” FRIDAY said gratefully.

Chapter End Notes
I really am grateful for all your replies, though. I'll reply back when I get the chance to. I had a lot. To those who were alarmed by last week's AN and sent messages that I wasn't able to reply to: pinkie-promise I am not suicidal, just stressed and sleep-crazed.

According to Wookieepedia, the House of Thul is House Organa's long-time enemy. HoT was backed by the Sith during a civil war a couple millennia ago.
Looking back at last chapter's AN, I can safely claim that I probably wasn't fully recovered when I wrote that one, either. I promise that it wasn't that bad. The "people" were just disembodied faces and only appeared when I use something with a light-emitting screen in the dark (sort of like they were lit by the glow), and I only saw the kid out of the corner of my eye. And while I get that the singing might be creepy to think about, it was more... reassuring... to me. I mean, dads are protectors. He doesn't sing much anymore; he only did it when I was a kid, but that particular hallucination made me feel safe and loved.

Honestly, I wasn't freaked out at the time. Probably would've been, if I was in my right mind, during those events, but it was more like feeling slightly alarmed/worried or just mild annoyance, depending on which it was.

Thanks to Tempest_Raining (how do I insert a link?) for pointing out that I didn't fix the Kristoff situation. Honestly, that was in the original chapter 15, the one that got messed up. Whoops. Apparently, when sleep-deprived ch. 15 got posted, real ch.15 stayed unfinished in the place where I left SD15. Instead of Kristoff and Tony laughing off their problems, we got Suffee doing... that strange, suspicious BS, the crew having an argument that's completely forgotten by next chapter, and miscellaneous angst just because I happened to be in a bad mood. There /was/ a reason I said that 15 was full of deleted scenes...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After his heart-to-heart - heart to core coding? - with FRIDAY, Tony just didn’t feel up to interacting with a large group of people. The Organas had left for Naboo and Tony was debating the merits of going after them. He would go into the lab, but Suffee had locked himself in there to conspire with FRIDAY or something. As it was, Kovlo was alone on the bridge, so that was where Tony went.

“Boss, I think you’d want to take a look at this,” FRIDAY announced. She called up an image of a post on StarkNet on the closest StarkPad. Kovlo gave them a curious look but politely turned back to the work Tony had assigned him. Tony glanced over to make sure the Rodian was correctly completing the simulation before going over what FRIDAY sent him, slowly raised his eyebrows as he read through it.

#StarkInDanger #StarkAlert #SOStark #DeslaverDroid

Am I the only one who noticed that the Deslaver Droid is following the Y-not? The Y-not landed on exactly 2 planets. Less than 200 miles away from wherever he lands, guess what appears? We have to protect Tony Stark!

-StarkCrazy

[Site Correction: #IronMan / Iron Man]
After he finished, Tony let out a low whistle. “Already? I expected them to catch on after four or five planets, not two! Make a note to hire whoever wrote that post when SI gets moving. That guy is on point.”

“Girl,” FRIDAY corrected. “What do you want to do about it? Only seventeen people have seen it so far. I can delete the post or bury it.”

“Not gonna work on the rabid fan types. They’ll just repost it,” Tony said, shaking his head. “Is there any way to show off one of our products or advertise? Maybe post a video with a stroll through the Y-not? Just make something more interesting to cover it up.”

“I have a better idea,” FRIDAY claimed. “Leave it to me!”

Tony watched as a separate browser opened and FRIDAY made a false account to send an email-style transmission. Seeing who it would be sent to, he lifted his eyebrow and jokingly asked, “Bail? He’s way past the alarming ‘twice your age’ level.”

FRIDAY’s only reply was a giggle. She finished writing her letter within seconds and sent it to the younger Organa before Tony could even start reading it. “Don’t worry. An hour after Bail reads the message, no one will be talking about Iron Man. They’ll be talking about me.” She made another giggle-like noise before closing that window.

Tony inwardly shrugged and turned back to show Kovlo how to check the security of the ship and several tactics of how to contain intruders with the electrical gates and descending blaster-proof partitions. “It’s all in the corners,” Tony lectured, pointing. “You have to be careful over here and here, because I haven’t updated those areas yet.”

“So over in the blue-shaded regions…” Kovlo trailed off as the hissing noise indicated the doors opening. Both Tony and Kovlo turned to see who entered.

“Who’s that?” Galee asked as she strutted into the bridge in whatever the latest Coruscanti fashion statement was. Tony eyed her questionably-colored top and obligingly followed her pointed finger to the main terminal. The hologram floating above it made him choke on air.

“Gkk!” Tony bit out between coughs. “What is that?”

Slowly rotating several inches above eye level was a 3-D image of a female version of his head and upper torso, albeit with several… differences.

Namely, a thinner face, longer hair, more delicate features, no beard, a slimmer set of shoulders, and a nicely-formed pair of breasts. In other words, a feminine version of him.

“Is that your mother?” Kovlo asked. He politely continued, “She is very beautiful. I see a definite resemblance. You must take after her.”

“I take after my dad, not my mom,” Tony said blankly. “Friday, who the kriff is that? Is that my doppelganger? I mean, dang! I knew that everyone had a twin somewhere in the universe, but dear universe messed up and created a female-me! Is there a Rhodey-ganger or a Pepper-ganger? No, wait. We need to contact her. Think of all the pranks we can play on the crew! Quick, where is-”

“That’s me,” FRIDAY interrupted.

Tony paused. “Friday…” His train of thought caught up quickly. “Wait, this is your hologram? Holoform?”

“What is this?” Galee asked insistently.
“It’s me,” FRIDAY answered, a question in her voice.

“It appears Miss Friday has decided to create an avatar,” Kovlo answered, eyes on the hologram. His eyes flicked to Tony and back, comparing them. In the end, the edges of his mouth tipped down in a small grimace. “No offense meant, Miss Friday, but this is rather…”

“Off-putting?” Tony suggested.

“Disgusting,” Galee finished. She shook her head. “A child should not... Well, no, that’s not the real problem, is it? The problem here is that you look like twins, when he is supposed to be your father. I know we can’t do anything about his age, but another set of alleles… Friday, sweetie? How ‘bout you let me help?”

“Help?” FRIDAY echoed.

“Yes, help. I know the latest fashions. I know how to coordinate your complexion to your eye color and hair. And,” she emphasized, fluttering her hands and steering Kovlo and Tony towards the exit, “I know what boys like.”

“Really?” FRIDAY asked hopefully.

“Yes! My shift’s soon, isn’t it? I can’t work and monitor the stations at the same time, can I? I need to call in a few favors. Open up a line to Charell and Suffee. I need backup.” Galee clapped her hands.

“Okay,” FRIDAY agreed.

Kovlo shrugged and stepped out of the room, looking at Tony. “My shift is almost over. Galee was supposed to take over for me.”

“Are you sure they’ll watch the controls? Galee’s going to go fashion-crazy on Friday,” Tony said worriedly.

“Nothing really happens this far into the Core Worlds, and we’re not even flying. We're just drifting. Besides, Charell and Suffee will be there. Charell does not care about looks as much, and Suffee will be a grounding presence,” Kovlo reassured him. The two turned to look towards the stairs as they heard a pair of footsteps approach.

“Fashion emergency! Out of the way,” Charell demanded, nearly shoving Kovlo aside. Tony stepped against the wall before she could do the same to him. Poor Suffee was dragged along at her heels, wrist in a vice-grip. The Rodian looked at Tony pleadingly.

‘Help me,’ Suffee mouthed to Tony in alarm.

Tony shook his head. ‘Sorry,’ he mouthed back. He wasn’t going to go back in that den. He turned back to Kovlo as the door slid open again and they could hear Galee berating FRIDAY.

“Brown and maroon? What are you thinking?!”

“It’s gold and scarlet!” FRIDAY protested. “The colors just don’t translate well with holomatter!”

“Well, you’d be using holomatter, correct? So shouldn’t you choose colors that look okay in holomatter?” Suffee asked hesitantly. “Sorry! No! I didn’t mean anything by it! No. No!” the Rodian yelled in alarm a split second later. The door shut.
“Nah, I don’t think that Suffee’s going to be grounding anyone. I didn’t even know Charell was such a girly-girl. Should we go save him?” Tony muttered, looking over his shoulder to make sure neither Galee or Charell were listening.

“Well, Suffee can man the stations while the girls go crazy,” Kovlo decided.

Inside the safe room, locked inside its tiny, shielded box, the artifact slowly filled up its space with what appeared to be moldy green ooze. It leaked out of the artifact’s pores in a slow but steady trickle, covering the bottom of the isolation box with a murky film.

The StarkWatch on Tony’s wrist beeped as Tony walked up the stairs. Galee demands that you update the holotransmitters, scrolled down the face of the watch. Tony snorted and opened his mouth to reply to Kovlo, when there was another beep. Requesting your presence in the kitchens to taste-test a cake for Kovlo. Don’t let him know.

“Right-o,” Tony said, clapping his hands, “gotta cook. See you in a bit.” He clapped Kovlo on the shoulder and marched toward the kitchen.

“Excellent. It is my turn to cook dinner. Will you be assisting me?” Kovlo asked, jogging a bit to catch up. He stumbled, catching himself on the wall, and looked down. “My eyelets are gone,” he said, frowning slightly at his boots, like it was their fault. Tony looked down and snorted. Sure enough, the metal eyelets of Kovlo’s shoes were gone, leaving behind misshapen holes in the boots and fraying laces.

“Actually, I’m taking over. You just go to the lounge or something. Fix up whatever happened with those shoes,” Tony said casually.

“You never cook. You said you don’t know how to,” Kovlo pointed out with a frown.

“And you always cook. It’s time for me to get some experience,” Tony bantered. “Seriously, I’m giving you a break, sort of like a thank-you present. Just relax.” The Rodian gave Tony a dubious look before heading down the hall. Tony waited to make sure Kovlo was actually going upstairs to the rec. room before opening the door. “Where’s the cake?” he asked, announcing his presence to the room. The very empty room.

“Hey Fri? I was promised cake. Where’s the cake?” he asked.

Wait 21 seconds.

Shrugging, Tony perched in one of the four booths the ‘cafeteria’ offered. Right on the twentieth second, the door slid open and Kristoff walked in. With no cake.

Kristoff glanced at him, then ambled over to the high counter that separated the kitchen from the eating area. He peered over, then looked back over to Tony. “I was promised cake?” he asked questioningly.

“So was I,” Tony admitted, drumming his fingers on the table. “Is it Kovlo’s birthday?”

“Not for a couple months. Why?” Kristoff asked.

Tony frowned. “The cake’s for him, right?”

“Uh, no. He’s cooking the cake. The cake’s for Suffee,” Kristoff answered.
“That makes no sense. Kovlo’s been in the bridge for the last four hours,” Tony informed him, a sinking feeling in his stomach. “Who told you he was baking a cake?”

“Friday did,” Kristoff answered, walking into the door. He let out a swear, holding his bleeding nose. “The door’s stuck! Stop playing around, Friday! Open it.”

“It’s not going to open,” Tony told him. He glanced at the camera. Like he suspected, they were all off.

“Kriffing-” Kristoff cursed, following Tony’s eyes to the camera. “Are we being hacked? Attacked?”

“Unlikely. Friday probably just got tired of us going circles around each other, so she locked us in until we make up or something. She’s monitoring our stats. until she thinks we’re relaxed enough or let off some friendship hormones.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier to listen in?” Kristoff asked.

“If I say the right codes or give the correct hand signal, the door will open. Friday’s preventing that by turning off the camera feeds and microphones. We’ll either have to wait until dinnertime or resolve our issues,” Tony said calmly.

Kristoff stood up and crossed his arms. “I have no issues with you, personally and professionally,” he said, meeting Tony’s eyes. “Do you have a problem with me?”

Considering the man before him thoughtfully, Tony said honestly, “I don’t think I do.” And, condemningly, it was the truth. He had worked alongside the woman who mindraped him. He had gotten rid of his anger the man whose hand strangled his mother. He had fought at the side of the man who used him while hiding his parents’ murders for years. This one spacer who had some suspicious side-jobs? Done. Over with it. It stung, but the pain faded and Tony got over it, like he always did.

“Then why are we here?” Kristoff asked, unaware of Tony’s introspection.

“What is between you and Fett?” Tony asked, not out of true criticism, only curiosity.

Unexpectedly, Kristoff winced. “I owe him. A lot. So now I have to repay him.” He lifted his chin and met Tony’s gaze squarely. “I’m paying him using my own money. I’m using my own spare time, and it neither affects my performance on missions or my duties on the ship. I admit to using your resources, but they are open to the crew to use freely.”

Tony nodded. Those were all variables he had calculated over the last week. He hated to be wrong, but it appeared for all intents and purposes that Kristoff’s contact with Fett was outwardly harmless to the crew. But he still had to make sure… “And the transmissions?”

Kristoff paused. “Yeah? What about them?”

“At least one sent every standard day, sometimes as many as three, usually sent after we jump to a new sector or complete a mission,” Tony rattled off.

Wincing again, Kristoff said, “Okay, when you put it like that, it sounds a little suspicious.”

“Very suspicious,” Tony agreed, rummaging in the refrigerator. He pulled out some sort of pinkish juice or cider. “Actually, not that suspicious. Galee sends about twenty of them every day, not to mention her presence on fashion blogs and StarkNet. I don’t ask what she sends or to who, so I don’t really have a reason to ask with you. If you feel like telling, you’ll tell me, and if not, well,
Taking the proffered bottle, Kristoff raised it to eye level. “You have a talent for making stuff sound horrible,” Kristoff said, with a shake of his head. “Fruit blood, really? Just say cider.” He narrowed his eyes, reading the label. With a shrug, he poured it out into two cups, placing one on the counter next to Tony. He raised his glass like he was toasting the inventor.

Tony took the other glass and sipped. “It’s a talent I have, right along with razing cities and ruining friendships.”

“A man of many talents, I see,” Kristoff snarked. “I, too, have noticeable skill in the art of destroying friendships.” This time, Tony toasted him. They looked mournfully at their glasses of juice. “It would be better if this had some alcohol in it,” Kristoff commented.

“Kovlo said Suffee hid some inside a wall, last week. Want to help me find it?” Tony offered.

“Nah, we can use some from my stash,” Kristoff said, kicking a tile out of its spot on the floor and removing a bottle from the space revealed.

Full capacity of its container reached, the trapped object could no longer exude any more sludge. Bubbling and frothing, it strained against the limits of the box it was in. Ultimately, it failed.

Charell let out a rare giggle at FRIDAY’s idea for bust size. She glanced to the sensors monitor, where Suffee was determinedly staring straight ahead, trying to ignore what was happening at the holotable. Looking back, she saw Galee tilt her head to gesture at Suffee, mouthing something. Charell wasn’t sure what Galee was trying to say, but called out to the Rodian anyways.

“Hey Suffee,” she said with a sing-song tone, “want to join us?”

The Rodian glanced over to the holotable terminal, looked over the gently floating avatar, then turned back at the sensor console. “Maybe less pink,” Suffee suggested. “Add a blaster by her hips, maybe a bracelet or two? If you really want to be taller, then just make the avatar taller. No need for heels. If you really want to be short, then wear heeled boots. Those points are impractical.”

“Don’t be such a bummer. Live a little,” Galee complained as FRIDAY decided to take the Rodian’s advice, getting rid of her Galee-approved strappy, scarlet heels.

“I’d be playing games on my StarkPhone and doing experiments if you hadn’t dragged me down,” Suffee pointed out mildly. “Besides, you know the rules. Someone has to be watching the consoles at all times. I assume that’s why you brought me here?”

“No, actually, we brought you here so-” Galee faltered as Suffee turned around and stared.

“You brought me so I could take over your shift,” Suffee said pointedly.

“Okay, okay,” Galee said, raising her hands. “Fine, if you say so. I’ll pretend I brought you here to do work.” She stuck her tongue at Suffee when the Rodian turned away.

“You realize I can see you through the camera?” Suffee asked.

Galee sulked. Charell shook her head in amusement, reaching for her blaster. “I have a nice blaster
you can copy.” Charell frowned when she realized the blaster wasn’t in its holster. She flushed embarrassedly. She never went around without a weapon. Nar Shadaa had taught her better than that.

“Don’t worry, I have the same model,” Galee reassured, unhooking her own. “Sleek and shiny!”

“Okay,” FRIDAY agreed demurely, like she had with all other suggestions, making a replica of the blaster and holster on her avatar’s right hip. After a moment, the holster became a fashionable double-strap, worn brown leather turning into bright gold.

Charell raised her wrist to show FRIDAY. “How about a bracelet like this? It’s pretty enough, but functional at the same time. Makes you look tough.”

“Rell, there’s nothing on there,” Galee said hesitantly.

Alarmed, Charell looked at her wrist. There was nothing there, the familiar weight gone. “What? I never take it off.” She stood up, eyes darting to her evacuated chair and the floor, despite herself. “This thing doesn’t just fall off!”

“Calm down, ‘Rell. We’ll find it” Suffee said soothingly.

The door closed behind him with an unsatisfying hiss as Bail stalked down the halls of the ship they were in. He wished for a frivolous moment that that they were still at home. The Organa Palace boasted several old-fashioned hinged doors that made very fulfilling bangs when slammed shut. The soft hum of the ship’s sliding doors could not produce such a feeling.

Bail stepped inside his room, leaning back on the door when it shut seamlessly into the walls. Closing his eyes, Bail leaned his head back onto the cool metal of the door. His trivial thoughts were merely a distraction to the news his father had told him. His family was in danger because of a secret, three-thousand-year rivalry that he had never heard of in all his historical pursuits. Those ‘accidents’ were not accidental in any shape or form. There were people after them, fellow Alderaanians.

Unconsciously, his hand sought the hilt of the sword strapped to his belt. He only noticed it after his hand wrapped around the simple leather grip.

Friday.

A smile rose, unbidden, to Bail’s lips. The sword was a gift from the lady Stark. Pure songsteel, inexpertly forged.

It was almost laughable, such an expensive, exquisite metal in an amateur work, but all Bail could feel was honor at holding such a weapon. He could feel the care put into every groove, the shine of the blade and the perfect balance. It would not surprise Bail if he found out that Friday herself created it. With its imperfections, the unintentional ripples that formed in the strong of the blade, the sword would never be considered a masterpiece, but to Bail, it was priceless.

A gift to protect you, the lady Friday had claimed through her device.

I shall wear it with pride, Bail had vowed, so you fight always by my side. The words had rang with quiet promise.

It did not escape Bail that the traditional roles had been reversed. Friday had made the first steps to
courtship. It was Friday who had brought him a gift, one that she herself created. She was different from all the other women he knew, with their painted faces and simpering words.

Bail wished that he had the foresight to ask Friday for a way of contacting her, but in his excitement, Bail had forgotten. He needed some advice, and he was sure Friday had some. She would know about being in the shadows of a father that seemed to do no wrong, who seemed invincible.

His comlink, carelessly discarded on the bed, beeped. *New message.* He picked it up and opened it.

[Unknown number] Friday Stark can be contacted on StarkNet.

-Insert Quote Here-

FRIDAY checked in on Tony and Kristoff. Their stats had shown that neither had been injured and that instead, they were getting drunk. “Was that so hard?” FRIDAY asked.

“Yes, yes it was,” Kristoff deadpanned.

“Sweetheart, you know how emotionally repressed we manly-men are,” Tony said, wagging a finger. “Don’t do that again.”

“Okay,” FRIDAY agreed. “I’ll unblock your earpieces now.”

“Huh,” Kristoff said, “Didn’t even notice those were off. Why didn’t we think of calling for help?” He reached for his earpiece, only to frown. “Wait, I had them on earlier. Where’d they go?”

“I don’t know about you, but I already knew Friday would’ve turned those off,” Tony answered absentmindedly. “She wouldn’t go through all that trouble only for us to take the easy way out. Huh, two new messages.”

“No, really. I had them on for the mission. I didn’t take them off. Where’d they go?” Kristoff asked frustratedly, ducking to look under the tables.

Tony glanced at him. “Check the cameras if you can’t find it. Play the messages, Fri,” Tony said.

“Tony,” Suffee’s voice said dangerously, “*get me out of here. Now.*” His voice changed from commanding to hysterical. “*They are talking about fashion and clothes and eyebrow ratio! Don’t leave me here. Make Bai-Gon take my spot. Or Gis. Kriff, I don’t care, make Kristoff do it! Anyone. I don’t care. Make it stop!*”

The second message was in text format. *Tell whoever took Charella’s bracelet to give it back. Galee gave it to her for her birthday. Get someone else to sacrifice, because I am not staying in here any longer. I will DRAG YOU in here if you don’t get someone RIGHT NOW.*

Tony tapped a button on the side to call Suffee back. “Suff’, get ready. I’ll lure Kristoff down and we’ll switch you out real quick.” Tony looked up to where Kristoff was looking at the ceiling and arguing with FRIDAY. “Hey Kristy, I have a job for you!”

“What?” Kristoff asked, following Tony out of the room. Tony led them to the stairs, looking back to see Kristoff brush his hand over his ear. “Hey, wait up!” He darted upstairs, only to come back empty-handed with a shrug.

“Camera feeds show that you haven’t had it on since you reported in for your post-mission briefing,” FRIDAY added.

“Right, the slime. I must have left it in the bathroom. then,” Kristoff said, looking disgruntled. “So,
what am I supposed to be doing?” he asked Tony.

“I’ll show you when we get there. Actually, no. You’ll know it when you get in.”
“In there?” Kristoff asked, looking at the closed door.

“Yep,” Tony said, scanning his finger. The door slid open and Suffee sprinted out. Tony shoved Kristoff in as the other man craned his head to watch the Rodian flee up the stairs. “Sorry, but when it comes to girls, it’s every man for himself. Nothing personal.” He quickly locked the doors, ignoring Kristoff’s shouts of protest and the ensuing pounds on the door.

Inside its prison, the churning ooze slowly turned a grimy green-brown. The parts that touched the edges and corners hissed and bubbled, steam coming out. In the safe room itself, though, nothing changed. Outwardly, the metal box in the center of the room looked untouched. As localized as it was, not even the advanced sensors registered the uptick in temperature.

#LookingForSomeone

Hello, would anyone be willing to assist me? I have recently come across information that Tony Stark has created this site. I am looking for a way to contact his daughter, Friday Stark. Would anyone be able to assist me in finding her? Thank you, and have a pleasant evening.
-BailOrgana

#Stark’sDaughter #FridayStark

Oh my goodness, did you hear? Tony Stark has a daughter!
-AgentBlues

[Site correction: OMG]

#Stark’sDaughter #StarkIsSpokenFor

Does that mean that Tony Stark is taken?
-MrsStark

#Stark’sDaughter #BabyStark #FridayStark

He’s, like, 25, right? So that makes her in the 2-5 years-old range, ‘cause Stark’s daughter should be smart enough to be able to read at the age of 2, and 1 should be pushing it? Dark hair and dark eyes, because those traits are dominant. Hyperactive, but very observant.
-TheoryOfTheGalaxy
I created a picture of what Stark’s daughter must look like! I used his coloring, but with my own tweaks. Tell me if you see her!

[Image]

-ColorsLikeSky

Still haven’t seen any toddlers around Stark. He sometimes hangs with some reptile teens, though?

-CoruscantCroissant

FRIDAY nearly giggled at all the attention. She would have, had she activated her avatar. As it was, she had to settle for the smug feeling of satisfaction at the outburst that a simple little transmission caused. All she had to do was send a message telling Bail that she could be contacted on StarkNet. When he went on, he unknowingly caused an uproar, letting her dad’s fans know that Tony Stark, the Tony Stark, had a daughter.

It didn’t make a huge splash, like it would’ve back on Earth. It wouldn’t even catch the attention of a fraction of the number. Boss only had a little under a thousand avid followers and roughly twice that number of casual followers. The clamor completely hid StarkCrazy’s previous post.

A large fraction of her attention was on the girls on the bridge, eagerly soaking up their advice. FRIDAY still didn’t understand why she could not have gold and silver straps on at the same time, but she accepted their expertise and made a note never to wear those colors together. Then, she turned her attention to the greater news circuits. Her advocating for the term Iron Man had a recent success in that it caused two minor news blogs and a major news network to coin the term in recent broadcasts and posts.

In addition, FRIDAY checked in on several conspiracy threads about Iron Man, Tony Stark, the Organas, and anything related to the Y-nauts. She finished settling some of the charges that Kristoff had, preventing him from returning to Corellia, made rude comments on a blog that ridiculed Alderaan’s new partnership with Naboo, and posted a picture of the lovely Alderaanian sunset outside on HisGirlFriday’s page. Carefully, she hacked Corellia’s main news network and made a voiceover saying ‘Iron Man’ whenever someone said ‘Ruby Robot’ or, as was popular on Corellia, ‘Crimson Crusader.’

As it was, she nearly, nearly, missed the 0.891°C increase in temperature of the isolation box. In a nanosecond, 79.21 percent of her processing power was leveled on the box, sensors primed and ready.

The alarms blared red.

Not a moment sooner, the isolation box burst open, sizzling remnants of the metal box rapidly dissolving. One by one, her sensors blinked and went offline, the ones in the flooring below. With alarm, FRIDAY noted that the slime was eating away at the durasteel flooring. It wasn’t particularly quick, but it was happening at a steady rate and showed no sign of slowing. The hole
was already nine feet wide and still expanding.

Questions about what was happening and demands for answers flew across the public Y-naut lines and FRIDAY was quick to update the crewmembers. Immediately, boss took control, having the junior members prepare to evacuate the ship. The Aleenas were sent into the space between the middle and lower decks to catalogue real-time damage, while the male Rodians had to suit up and try to contain the damage.

“Kristoff! Get the Aleenas more repair supplies!” Boss barked into his earpiece. Remembering that Kristoff did not have his earpiece with him, FRIDAY sent that order through the PA system and checked the cameras again. Boss was retreating to the workshop with a sample of the slime, hoping to find something to neutralize it. She could see a Rodian scrambling around the hole in the floor as another entered the room, but of the Aleenas, she had no idea.

The sensors between the middle and lower decks were inert, but sensors in the containment room itself registered rapid changes in the gas composition in the room, signaling that some gas pipe in the floor had been compromised. When the carbon dioxide levels stopped and held steady, FRIDAY hoped that it meant the Aleenas were active and well.

Loudly spoken words caught her attention. “Tell Tony I’m on it!” Kristoff yelled, raising a hand to the camera as he darted out of the cargo bay with powered welders and miscellaneous metal scraps. FRIDAY did not bother telling Boss, knowing that Boss trusted Kristoff to follow his orders.

FRIDAY was horrified to realize that the seeping slime on the floor seemed to increase in mass, but from the grim faces of the Rodians, FRIDAY guessed that they already knew. FRIDAY turned her attention to the control bridge, knowing that it was directly under the containment room.

“Misses?” the AI alerted the girls frantically trying to pull up a fail-safe. FRIDAY did not tell Galee that the fail-safe had already been active - the only reason it was registered as offline on-screen was because it had been eaten by the slime.

“Senn, one of the coolant lines is damaged. Upper left!” Charell barked into a microphone.

“Roger that!” Borr answered. FRIDAY felt a rigid shock go through her systems when she pinged Senn, only to find that his earpiece was inactive. She located all of the active earpieces, only to find that Shoragg’s earpiece was also offline. A quick check on the only remaining camera in the containment room revealed only one Rodian on-screen.

“FRIDAY?” Suffee asked from the terminal, not slowing as fingers flicked through sites on the HoloNet. The Rodian was trying to find some sort of correlation between the images.

“May I suggest an evacuation of the bridge?”

Suffee’s eyes widened and the Rodian glanced up at the ceiling. “Girls! We have to get out of here!”

“Why?” Charell asked, already standing up. The Rodian on the screen behind her slipped and nearly fell into the widening chasm, only to be grabbed by Kristoff and hauled up.

“No, wait!” Galee protested as Suffee grabbed her by the wrist and began physically removing her from the room. “I can still help!”

“There is currently less than half a foot of durasteel between the bridge and the containment room,” FRIDAY informed them. Galee’s eyes bugged, but FRIDAY paid no mind, already encrypting data into folders and tossing them onto various pages of StarkNet. If any user opened
them, all they would find was useless Earthen binary.

“I need at least two people to help me carry these up to the containment room!” Boss barked. As one, the girls turned and ran towards the workshop.

“We will be needing some on the bridge as well,” FRIDAY informed them calmly. Simultaneously, she directed Borr to a safer area. With the girls out of the way, FRIDAY turned her attention to the main terminal where she resided. According to her calculations, it would be at the epicenter when the ceiling finally gave away.

Charell reached the containment room first, sprinting in and tossing her buckets of solution into the hole before turning to fetch some more.

FRIDAY noted the durasteel above the terminal buckling. She turned her attention to her own files.

Pinned under a collapsed beam somewhere under the murky substance, Shoragg was grateful for the suits that Tony had insisted they wear. He gasped, losing valuable oxygen, when the pressure on his legs increased. Any more and he was sure his bones would be crushed.

Kristoff hastened to take one of Galee’s buckets when she staggered in, lowering it down to Kovlo. He wasn't sure if it was doing anything, but some hope was better than no hope. This was their home.

With a string of harsh Aleena from his toothy mouth, Borr hauled Senn’s inert body up, one hand on a pipe and the other around his father. His fingers weren’t wide enough to grab the next pipe with only one hand, but he wouldn’t leave his father behind. He turned and watched as the slime rose. It spilled onto the ledge he was on, rising to his ankles.

Strapping a wide-eyed infant Aleena into a containment pod with her older brother, Greer sealed the pod and primed it for launch. Only now able to head to the containment room, Greer ran down the hall.

Finishing the mixing of eleven more gallons of solution, Tony raced to the control room, his own bucket filled with mixture. Upon entering the room, he paused, having expected something other than a quiet, empty bridge. A creak sounded above him. With horror, he looked up.

Hanging over the edge of the chasm, Suffee started applying solution to weakening areas along the supports, ignoring the gashes that cut through cloth and into abdominal scales from the uneven edges.

A metal sheet gave away underneath Kovlo, sending him splashing into the slime-filled pit to Charell’s alarmed cry.

And the ceiling finally caved in, sending gallons of sludge pouring down on FRIDAY’s terminal.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, guys baffle me. If I, a girl, get into a fight with my female cousin, it is World War III. If my brother gets into a fight with our male cousin... the moment food is brought out, all is forgotten. My brother would pass over a slice of bread, and
suddenly they're bros again snickering at the TV and tossing napkins at each other. I'm talking about college-aged boys, here. And I've seen many variations of this event. How do guys do it? Just... let things go?

For some odd reason, my chapters have been slowly growing longer. More words per chapter. You guys probably don't mind, but... It's really throwing the part of me that rejects circles and underlines my chemistry notes with a ruler into a tizzy, because the chapters. Aren't. Even. *Screams in frustration and bangs head against wall*

So. Anyone have any suggestion for FRIDAY's avatar? I mean, we can go classic Italian, with that exotic dark hair and eyes, or she can be a wild child with 'dyed hair' and 'contacts,' or even a red head with gold highlights (go Iron Man! :P) or a bunch of other looks. I can't decide what to have for lunch. How can I make such a huge decision?
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Anyone know how to add links into this?

For a moment, I thought I wouldn't be able to make the deadline... Ha! One minute before o'clock! No early update next week for you guys! *Does happy dance, then realizes how odd it looks*

And can any Star Wars expert please explain to me what happens to trash on Coruscant? I combed through dozens of clips and can't find anything that viable to be considered a trash truck. Do they just incinerate it in their buildings? Pour it down a pipe that leads down, towards the core of the planet? It's late at night, so I get weird thoughts, but I still can't figure it out...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony!

There was chaos brewing around him, but for Tony, the world narrowed down to the melting terminal where one FRIDAY Stark used to preside. It had all her data. Tony’s throat constricted. Not again. He already lost a kid. He couldn’t lose another one. JARVIS…

*Hey, get up! We’ve got to move!*

The pipe weighing him down to the floor was lightened slightly by another person. Together, with Tony’s enhanced strength, the pressure on his back was removed. A grip on his arm, pulling him up.

“Friday,” Tony muttered. He drew away from whoever had him, raising a helpless hand towards the terminal.

*Come on! Whatever the water was wasn’t enough. The ship is still being damaged! Are you listening to me? Snap out of it! Let’s go!*

Hard force on his chest. A shove? Someone tried to shove him…

The blurred figure in front of him was pushed away by another one.

*Stop it, Greer! Like you would be any better if someone you loved died!*

Died.

Tony caught that word. Was FRIDAY... dead?

*Hey, Tony, can you hear me?*

There were hands on his shoulders, large and warm. A face filled his vision, cutting his line of sight to the terminal. Lips were moving, but try as he might, Tony could not make out the words through the ringing in his ears.
D*** it! He has blood coming out of his ears! Is this a concussion, or is he in shock? Is it both? What do I do?

Bacta - it fixes pretty much anything, right? Catch!

The person - blond, tall. Kristoff? - made a quick, calculated movement, like he was snatching something out of the air. There was a semi-familiar prick on the back of his neck. Injection.

Moments later, Tony could feel familiar heat rushing through his veins, Extremis consuming the bacta and racing to bring him back to peak condition. The word started clearing up and the fog lifted from his head.

Tony. What’s done is done. We need you right now.

The hands on his shoulders shook him roughly but gently, if there was such a thing. It served the purpose of fully snapping Tony out of the remnants of his daze. Brown eyes sharpened, darting around the destroyed bridge and taking in the aftermath.

Two fully-suited Rodians were on the bridge. Of the two, one of them was prone on the ground, pinned by various metal bits, while the other one was frantically trying to lift the metal sheets off of him. Tony could see two of the Aleenas huddled on a newly-formed ledge. Charell was in the space between the floors, suited in decontamination slacks and gingerly trying to climb to the Aleenas with minimal contact of slime to her unprotected hands.

Tony’s gaze snapped back to Kristoff’s, and the blond man’s relief showed plainly on his face.

“You back with us?” Kristoff asked. He held up a hand. “How many fingers am I holding up?”

“One. Your middle finger. Are you trying to tell me something?”

“Just making sure,” Kristoff answered, slapping him on the back. He froze when Tony flinched away. “Er… Is this something I have to be worried about?”

“I got hit by the ceiling,” Tony deadpanned. “Of course there’s some leftover bruises.” Except there weren’t. Extremis had turned its attention on his more minor injuries after the major one was taken care of.

Tony’s automatic reaction was guilt – he lied to a teammate. Then logic took over. His mind kicked into overdrive, abuzz with questions. Why did he lie? Was it an automatic response? Tony really hoped he did not become a compulsive liar. He might not be sure if Kristoff was trustworthy yet, but the man hasn’t proven himself untrustworthy.

But why did he flinch? Likely a conditioned response in response to years of putdown, in addition to physical confrontation with a man that held a physical similarity. Or something like that. He studied tech and engineering. Those things were easy, unlike human beings.

Forcibly shutting down that thought process, Tony turned to the problem at hand. There would be more time for introspection later. His crew needed him now.

The entire thought process, enhanced by Extremis, had taken him less than two seconds.

“What now, sir?” Kristoff asked. Tony looked sharply at the blond man, unsure if he put emphasis on the last word due to disrespect or some other underlying reason. A moment later, he rebuked himself for having such thoughts.

“Dang it, not again,” Tony muttered, using both arms to sweep slime off of the main terminal. FRIDAY’s terminal. “You’re not in here, right, Fri?” Rivers of the substance were pushed off of
the terminal’s flat surface, oozing down the side. Right on cue, the terminal hissed and sparked weakly. FRIDAY remained unresponsive. “If anyone gets into contact with Friday, tell her to contact the nearest planet, find the nearest shuttle passing by, anything. We need to get off the ship. It’s now-” A death trap, Tony finished in his head. “-unable to transport us.”

Tony automatically reached for his earpiece, only to fall short when he remembered that the kriffing fungus was strictly metal-eating. Tony had a moment of hysteria - that must have been what happened to Kristoff’s earpiece and Kovlo’s eyelets. “Is everyone okay?” Tony asked loudly, looking up the hole.

“What happened to Friday?” Galee asked, looking inches from tears. “I didn't finish explaining why she shouldn’t wear hot pink and red together!” She let out a strangled wail.

“She’s fine,” Tony reassured the near-human, a bit baffled about why the two colors did not go well together when they were just a shade off. He was half convinced that Galee was serious. The other part of him thought that Galee was trying to distract herself from the critical situation. “My girl is smart. She’d see the danger and get out. I’m sure she’s holed up in the HoloNet somewhere. We’ll find her.” He shook his head, letting some neutralized slime fall harmlessly off and joining the pool on the floor.

“You’re not melting,” Kristoff said blankly, looking at the blob.

Tony clapped his hands. “A true genius,” he said sarcastically, eyes darting around to catalogue the damage. It was not good. There had not been enough compounds to create more solution, and parts of the ship were still melting.

Tony spotted figure prone on the ground, half-hidden by a broken panel. He made his way to the motionless Rodian, identifying him as Shoragg. Tony began cutting parts of Shoragg’s decontamination suit away, finding a pulse on his neck.

“You’re covered in the goo,” Kristoff pointed out, stepping out of the way so that Greer could rush the floating stretcher to Shoragg. “The very acidic goo that’s literally eating our spaceship.”

Crouched beside Shoragg, Tony took several moments of their rapidly diminishing time to stare at Kristoff, though his hands did not pause from binding whatever wounds he could see. “You, Galee, and Kovlo were all completely coated with this stuff when you came back from your mission. As we can clearly see, you guys are whole and hale.” Tony glanced to were Kovlo was groaning on the floor across the room. “Well, mostly hale,” he amended, watching as Suffee led Fix-it towards the bridge, then thought better of bringing a robot into a room filled with metal-eating fungus. Instead, they waited for Greer to bring Shoragg to them.

Staring at his hand, Kristoff muttered, “Right…”

“It’s actually a rare, metal-eating fungus, by the way,” Tony said, realizing it was a good idea to inform his team what they were up against.

“This thing that nearly killed us is mold?” Charell asked incredulously, nudging the Aleenans to safety. She wrinkled her nose in distaste.

“Yep. Seeing that we, as organic beings, are not made of metal, we are not melting. The ship, however, is another story. Everyone to the escape pods,” Tony ordered. When they looked at him, stunned, Tony added defensively, “I didn’t have enough bantha milk to make more!”

“No one is blaming you, Tony. Everyone get ready to move out to the pods,” Suffee said crisply.
“Why did we have twenty gallons of bantha milk, anyways?”

“Hey don’t diss the milk. It’s good stuff,” Kristoff claimed.

“Are you sure this stuff is harmless?” Charell asked warily.

“On second thought, we’re all going to decontamination first. I don’t want the fungus eating the escape pods while we’re in it. That would be bad.”

“I didn’t touch it,” Charell claimed.

“You’re still going into decontamination,” Tony said blithely. “The solution I used? One of the active ingredients is sulfur. It happens to be very acidic. You don’t want it on you. Trust me.”

Charell gave him an alarmed look and all but ran out of the room, presumably towards the decontamination room. Watching her go, Suffee commented, “None of you seem particularly worried about Tony’s repeated insistence that the ship is going down.”

“Tony’s not panicking,” Greer pointed out. He peered over at Tony. “Unless he starts running to the pods, I’m not leaving. This ship is my home.”

“Oh, for heaven’s- Look, we’re not abandoning it forever. She’s a sturdy starship, the best of the best. She just needs some repairs and she’ll be up and ready to go in no time. We just have to make sure we live long enough to make the repairs.”

“Does anyone know what system we are in? How do we find the closest habitable planet?” Suffee challenged. “We are running out of time.”

“Um, about that?” Kristoff said with a caution that had Tony glancing over.

“Yeah, now would be a good time to ask your buddy to come and pick us up,” Tony said agreeably. Kristoff froze, looking like a deer caught in headlights. “Yeah, I knew about that,” Tony said, patting Kristoff on the back sympathetically while internally preening with pride. “His shields are good. It’s just that my sensors are better.”

“Uh, what?” Greer asked.

“Kristoff’s bestie has been tailing us - yes, Kristy, I knew he was following us for the last couple of… well, you know. The Y-not has been specially equipped by me. Sensors, weapons, and some extra goodies. She hasn’t come across a cloaking device she can’t sense,” Tony said with pride, stroking the wall of the ship fondly. He received disturbed looks in response.

“Please tell me there isn’t another AI specifically for the ship,” Suffee muttered.

“I’d say that was bragging, but every word is true,” Kristoff said at the same time.

“ Took the words right out of my mouth,” Tony agreed. Suffee’s eyes sharpened on Tony, glancing between him and Kristoff. Catching sight of where Suffee was looking, Galee’s face broke into a smile.

The near-human was about to say something, when Greer asked, “So no one’s worried that someone’s been following us for who knows how long?” There was an awkward moment of silence where the rest of the crew looked amongst each other. “Right. Okay,” Greer muttered defeatedly.

“I’ll go… call him, I guess,” Kristoff said, looking up the hole. “I’ll be in my room with my
StarkPad. How long do we have?"

“I put some extra shielding on the outside of the Y-not, which will buy us some time. Still, we should get out of here within the next thirty minutes, just to be safe,” Tony estimated. Kristoff made a two-fingered peace sign - must have been taking culture lessons from FRIDAY - and headed to the doorway. “Decontaminate before touching my beautiful tech!” Tony shouted after him. Still holding up his hand, Kristoff lowered his pointer finger and strolled out of the room, one finger still in the air.

The rest of the crew ran to gather what items they valued most, while Tony sat on the pilot’s seat, watching the stars until a starship burst out of hyperspace several hundred meters away. It was obviously built for speed, with enough modifications to denote it as owned by a smuggler or bounty hunter, the scourges of society. It was much like the Y-not in that regard.

“The Black Fist,” Tony read the blocky script aloud. It was an odd name. Black was a color of mourning, death, and evil. Fist denoted control and violence. Neither was something Tony automatically connected with Fett. Mourning his planet, maybe? And controlling… actually, Tony had nothing. Fett was probably a good leader, not a control freak that led through violence. At least, Tony hoped he was. The name wasn't very reassuring, though, and Tony fought really hard not to second-guess his decision to trust Kristoff.

One of the consoles sparked weakly and beeped as it picked up a transmission. Tony did not bother trying to receive it; the speakers were already melted past the point of no return.

Standing up, Tony stalked the halls of the Y-not, knocking on the doors and stopping everyone he could see to quietly instruct them down to escape bay. Finding Kristoff in his cabin, Tony asked, “Did you tell him…?”

“Yeah, he’s going to lock onto our ship.” Kristoff glanced over at Tony. “He’s not happy he has to help us. And he’s really not happy that you knew he was there.”

“You told him?” Tony asked, surprised.

Kristoff bit his lip. “Was I not supposed to?”

Tony thought about it. “I trust your judgement,” he said, finally. Because Kristoff was not Steve Rogers and should not be treated as such. Because the only way to find out if someone would betray you is to give them a chance to. Because Tony was willing to give him that chance.

-The Insert Quote Here-

The first thing Tony thought when he saw Jango ‘Kriffing’ Fett was that he looked good. In an entirely objective medical standpoint, of course. The bags under his eyes were less prominent than before. He had filled out a bit more and looked less ragged and stressed, overall.

Physically, he was doing better. Mentally and emotionally?

Before, the man had seemed brittle. Strong and stoic, yes, but easily shattered if you knew how to hit him, just like Tony himself was. Now, there was some steel in his eyes and he stood taller. The last few months had been good on him. Tony wished he could say the same for himself.

“Nice to see you again, Fett,” Tony greeted him.

“Likewise, Stark,” Fett returned neutrally. The Mandalorian looked over Tony quickly, eyes locking on the inventor's hidden weapons with surprising skill. To his credit, Fett did not balk at
the amount of weapons the Y-nauts were bringing onto his ship. Neither did he demand they remove them. It took guts and was very telling of the relationship Fett had with Kristoff.

One arm pressed against the bandage on his abdomen, Suffee stared at Fett, then pointedly looked at Tony and, once he was sure he had Tony’s attention, directed his gaze to a broken chain on the floor. Slave chains. Tony eyed the bloodstains on the flooring and the scorched marks on the walls. It did explain the suspicious ship name, though; Fett must have forcibly taken the ship from slavers. Tony shook his head and Suffee relaxed.

“Well, everyone be sure to thank Fett for his timely rescue. He-”

Tony was interrupted when Bai-Gon and Quinton chorused in monotone voices, “Thank you, Fett.”

Everyone looked to Fett, but the bounty hunter did not acknowledge the mocking thanks in any way.

“As I was saying, he’s sort of been following us, but that’s okay. He’s an ally and we will most likely have to repay him in some way at a future time.” Tony turned to Fett. “That said, what kind of help can we expect from you? Drop-us-off-at-the-closest-spaceport help? Or here-are-some-supplies-go-fix-your-ship-and-get-off-mine help?”

If Tony had been any further away from the other man, or if he had not been paying as close attention as he was, Tony would have missed the split second where Fett glanced in Kristoff’s direction before he answered. Valiantly, Tony resisted the urge to facepalm and tell the Mandalorian that he was a grown up and to make his own dang decisions. “Whatever you need,” Fett answered, seemingly unconcerned.

Everyone gathered in the largest room, perched on crates and squeezed into corners. Even the little kids were there, playing quietly in the corner. Shoragg’s mysterious wife was with them in Shoragg’s place, the male Rodian in urgent condition in The Black Fist’s rough equivalence of a med bay, glancing up when Tony walked in. Tony was surprised to note that there were actually fourteen Aleenas on the ship, not the six he thought there were. He felt ashamed that he had not taken the time to meet every one of his crewmates. For the first time ever, the entire crew was in one room. They looked expectantly at Tony as he sat down, their stares a more heavy presence than reporters at an SI press conference.

“Glad to see everyone here, for once. You all tried your best getting out of my meetings, but when Fett suggests one, you’re all here,” Tony said dryly. “Okay, first of all, I owe you an apology, Kristy,” Tony told Kristoff.

“You can start by not calling me ‘Kristy,’” Kristoff said, sulking.

“Kristine, I haven’t been the best teammate, and I know I can be difficult to work with once I got an idea in my head.”

“Yeah, you are,” Kristoff agreed, grumbling at the nickname but conceding defeat. Tony looked at him expectantly. “Fine. Yeah. I forgive you.”

“Which brings me to my next point. I’ve worked solo. I’ve worked in teams. I’ve played consultant, tech support, and business leader. I have even led my fair share of research groups. What I haven’t done is be a team leader in a group as… active as this one. I will make mistakes.
That’s why I need you all to be active in the day-to-day running of the team.” Tony took a deep
breath before continuing. “I know I haven’t been a good leader. I’ve been shut in the workshop. A
few of you still feel intimidated by me.” His eyes darted to Kovlo. “I’d like to let you know that my
doors are always open. You don’t have to be afraid. I don’t retaliate for differences of opinion. I
can’t promise that I’ll always abate your concerns, but I can promise that I’ll take them into
consideration.”

“It’s fine. It’s just the kriffing caste system,” Kovlo answered quietly.

Tony continued, “I value each and every one of you. You're all equal in my eyes. 'Cept for Suffee.
And Kristina, I guess.”

At that, Suffee startled, jerking and looking at him in askance, a hurt look on his face that was
quickly masked. Kristoff, on the other hand, leaned back with his arms crossed, an eyebrow raised.
Tony got the general impression that the ex-smuggler knew exactly what was going to happen.
Tony could almost feel the uptick in tension and rushed to diffuse it.

"As my co-captain, Suffee has just as much authority as me, and Krissy is our second-in-command.
Or third. I'm not too sure on the numbering system."

"Oh," Suffee said quietly. "I was worried for a second."

"Not me. I was hoping for some juicy drama," Galee said disappointedly, ridding the last of the
tension.

Turning point reached, Tony hesitated, eyes darting around the crowd to gauge their feelings.
“And… I guess I should tell you everything. It’s the only way you’ll understand.”

And Tony talked.

He spoke of the tiny, isolated planet that had not achieved prolonged space travel yet. He spoke of
a hurting young man who did everything he could to drown out the pain inside. He told of a cave in
a desert where he was cut open, his heart quite literally held bare. His pseudo-father’s betrayal and
the irony of having the very thing that saved him now poisoning him, it was all recounted. He
focused more on the betrayals themselves, rather than the details. The Iron Man armor was
regulated into a minor detail - a fancy prosthetic that was never completely described as more than
a helpful tool. He promised himself to let them know... just not yet.

He started off with a firm voice and straight posture, but as the minutes ticked into hours, his voice
grew hoarse and Tony stopped meeting their eyes as his failures were rehashed. The crew was held
in disbelief as Tony explained the mechanics of the portal that brought aliens to his city. Many of
the Y-nauts gave jerks of recognition when Tony went over Killigan and his flawed Extremis, the
fire underneath Pepper’s skin that nearly burnt her out. They debated about the lives lost to data
spilled online.

Tony did not attempt to spare himself when they reached Ultron, but instead of the recriminations
he was expecting, Galee threw herself into his arms in tears and the rest of the group was in various
states of horror and sympathy. They had a short discussion about JARVIS and the mortality of AIs,
Tony expressing his belief that FRIDAY was fine. Everyone seemed to be in disbelief when Tony
sheepishly admitted he continued funding the Avengers even after he was all but forced to step
down.

The media-coined ‘Civil War’ incident started off by receiving mixed results, seeing that half of
the group, Fett included, considered laws as recommendations more than anything. As bounty
hunters, borders only provided a mild deterrent and they reflexively chafed at being restrained. Of the group, only Suffee and, strangely enough, Galee seemed to approve of his stance on the Accords. They slowly grew thoughtful as the Accords became a mere footnote in the story.

When Tony revealed that Rogers had hidden his parents’ murder from him, Kristoff let out a string of Huttese, while Hoviv muttered something that had his mother smacking him. Tony kept his head down and continued his recounting.

Lastly, Tony had touched upon Thanos and the threat upon his universe. He explained how he lured the majority Thanos’ main forces to the ruins of Asgard, but was unable to trick the titan himself into joining the wild goose chase. He spoke of the casualties that resulted from Thanos’ attack on Earth and the month-long war before the gauntlet was forcibly removed from Thanos.

“I had a choice,” Tony muttered. “I could try to bring back those who died, or I could try to destroy the rest Thanos’ forces. They were coming, you know. Even if we took care of Thanos, the rest of them were still pouring in from Asgard. I got cocky. I thought I could bring back everyone and still have enough to raze the Chitauri. I should have remembered that I tend to destroy things, rather than create.” He laughed bitterly. “There’s a reason they called me the Merchant of Death.” He chanced a glance up, only to spot Gis, who seemed more impressed by the title than anything. Not the emotion Tony was looking for, but better than disgust.

With one last burst of energy, he explained his misunderstanding with Wanda, a misunderstanding that sent him to a completely different universe. He ashamedly confessed his relief at not being on Earth for the final fight. “I knew we could take them. It would take time and casualties, but we could defeat them. But… I couldn’t fight any more. I took one too many hits, lost one of the few people I had left, and when I came into this universe, I was a little shattered. Maybe I still am.”

“So,” Tony said, leaning back and crossing his arms protectively over his chest, “those are all my cards. This is me, raw and unedited. My thoughts, my motives, my secrets - everything. The dice is in your hands, now. What will you have of me?” The seconds trickled by, heightening Tony’s anxiety. Gis pulled out a bouncy red ball and tossed it onto the floor, making a dull pounding noise that sounded louder in the silence.

“What do you mean?” Kristoff asked after a long moment that was broken only by the thump of Gis's ball. He made a grab for it but missed, sending it rolling under Greer's chair.

“Exactly what it sounds like,” Tony said with false easiness, distracted by the Greer picking up the ball and glancing calculatingly in Gis's direction. "I'll accept anything you guys want. If you think I should be demoted and put Suffee down as captain, I do it. If you think I’m a liability and kick me off the team, I’ll go. You guys can keep the ship. I’ll be okay on my own. If you want me regulated to tech sup-" He paused to lean his torso to the right to avoid Gis's red ball being lobbed at him.

“We aren’t like your old team, captain,” Greer said grouchily. “We aren’t going to reap the benefits of being on your team without you actually being on the team.”

A small smile made its way onto Tony’s face before he could stop it, and a spark of hope flickered to life in his chest. Tony immediately tried to squash it - Greer was just one person. He was glad to have Greer’s support, but his fate still hinged on the rest of the team.

“That explains a lot,” Suffee muttered. "I think you are a good person. A bit reckless, at times, but you mean well." He stomped on the ball before it could roll past him, steadfastly ignoring Gis's attempt to get it back.
“This isn’t a joke, right?” Kristoff asked. Bai-Gon smacked the back of his head, ducking Kristoff’s retaliating punch.

"I'm fine with it. He's the same irrelevant, slightly unstable person he was-" Bai-Gon checked his StarkPhone for the time. "-two and a half hours ago." He kicked Suffee's foot away, snatched Gis's ball, and lobbed it at Tony, who avoided it with a neat sidestep. Suffee gave Bai-Gon a nasty look for it, which the man guiltily avoided.

“I think it makes you mysterious,” Galee said dreamily.

Tony spotted the flirtation before she could ramp it up. “I have a girlfriend. And I'm twice your age,” Tony told her flatly. “So, no objections?” He cast a glance around. He spotted a raised hand. “This isn't a classroom. Just talk.”

“I have so many questions,” Hoviv announced. "Can I be captain? Can I get fire-powers? I want a giant shield, too!"

As he split off from the rest of the group, Tony noticed that he had a shadow. “You get this gist of what I said, Gis?” Tony asked, realizing that FRIDAY was no longer there to be able to translate what he said to Dosh.

“Know Bassic,” Gis hissed, arms crossed. He turned his head away for a moment, then faced Tony head-on. “Ssspider can fight. Gis'tik Kal Tos strong, can fight!” He looked pleadingly at Tony.

“Yeah, well… Peter is different. He- I-” Tony groaned in frustration, putting his hand over his face. “Gis, I’m your… well, I’m responsible for you now. I know that you can fight and defend yourself, but- I mean… how do you think I’d feel if you got hurt?”

Gis turned his head away.

Tony reached up and patted him on the head. “Just… please think about it, ‘kay? I wouldn’t forgive myself if something happened. I’ve already lost a couple kids. The rest of them are stuck in another universe, and Friday’s who-knows-where. I can’t lose you too.”

Reaching the cabin he was assigned, Tony noticed that his StarkPad had thirty-one separate messages. Tony pressed play. A hologram of Prestor popped up. He looked very annoyed. “Tony are you telling me that you had colored holograms and decided not to sell them?” Prestor demanded. “Forgive my tactlessness and political incorrectness, but Tony… you are the most ridiculous, idiotic man I have ever had the honor of meeting.” With that said, the prerecorded message shut off.

Right. The most this universe had were glitchy, staticy blue ones. Tony thought back to the holograms he showed Prestor during their last meeting, realizing that they were all in blocked colors.

“Wow. I am an idiot. Friday, get on that. We need patents, bl-” Tony stopped. “Nevermind,” he said to the empty air. He pressed the next one. It was a short message from… Paramexor? Tony opened it.
::Do not take the bounty. Trap:::

Chapter End Notes

Comic Science Notes: The metal-eating fungus was an idea I got after researching Mace Windu for another story. His homeworld had them. I didn’t mention what was in the solution by name last chapter because I couldn’t figure out what to put in there. Mace’s people used amber, but that was more to repel the fungus than anything. So, I looked up fungicides on Wikipedia. Sulfur is a common ingredient in them. Natural defences against fungi in nature (some can be used as fungicides) include milk and certain oils. I was too lazy to look up similar SW plants to make up what oil was made from, but I knew that banthas make milk. Ergo, Kristoff drinks bantha milk. Drink milk, peeps. It makes you big and strong… This is off-topic and I don’t know why it’s here.

Yes, I know that Infinity War didn't go like that. The idea for this came from all the way in December, remember? This is /my/ version of events.

Before any of you go off on me, yes, I do think that Tony paid for everything. None of Team Cap (except maybe Lang) had jobs, and they certainly weren’t funded by the government. I do think that it cost Tony millions. Electric and heating for the compound, clothing and feeding the Avengers, suits and weapons… A ride overseas (Cap makes multiple trips to search for Bucky between the movies) would cost tens of thousands in gas alone, depending on the plane they pick...

Anyone want to tell me jokes or something? Distract me somehow? My mom and I got into a fight three days ago, and it's making me have a hard time keeping upbeat, even with my usual tactics of sugar and denial. Somehow, we went from an argument about how I defended my little brother when our aunt was picking on him, to my mom repeatedly threatening to kill herself for my happiness. Apparently, I'm that bad of a kid. She just... puts words into my mouth, twisting whatever I say. I said that my aunt didn't listen. She brings up how she tried to talk to that aunt on my behalf three years ago, leading to that aunt threatening to commit suicide. Then she asked if I would like her to die too, and that she would kill herself if I just said the word. I'm pretty sure she wasn't serious, though.
Early Update! That's because it's my 'non-birthday;' I took my real birthday, subtracted my brother's birthday, multiplied by my favorite number, then divided it by my age. I multiplied by the number of hugs I was able to con from my brother this last month. Then I rounded up and took away every other number. It's...pretty close to this date. 678. 6 for the month, 7 looks like 1, and 8 is almost 9. Celebrate my non-birthday with me! Whee! Meh, this is a boring chapter anyways.

Guys… This IS fanfiction. That means that I can and will modify Star Wars canon events for my own use. MCU is the same, up until Infinity War, which I have yet to watch.

Wait... I'm doing Fail (FRIDAY/Bail)... does this mean I have to change the No Relationships tag? O.o

Tony stared. He looked at the timestamp. It was sent just two hours prior. He closed his eyes and counted to ten. Then, he opened them and read the message again.

::Do not take the bounty. Trap::

That was it. No hints or explanation. He thought of how the ship started melting from the ‘artifact.’ "Well, it’s a little too late for that," Tony grumbled to himself, wishing FRIDAY was there so he could argue on the logistics of it. He quickly typed up a message and sent it back.

::Yeah. It was a trap. Who set it up?:

Staring out the window, Tony wondered what he should do next. Realizing that, without his workshop, he had a lot more time on his hands, Tony set to work. Projecting a holographic keyboard so he could type with speed, Tony set about hacking into the transmission system. Tony respected Paramexor enough not to hack into the bounty hunter’s account, but he set an alert so that he would know when Paramexor read his message.

Not knowing how long it would take to reach Paramexor and how often the guy checked his inboxes, assuming he had more than one, Tony considered himself finished for now. The alerts he put on the Bounty Hunter’s Guild had flagged several bounties that fit the search parameters he set up. He flipped through several bounties that his crew would not be able to take.

Near the end, Tony found a bounty specifically for him; one of the artifact collectors that they’ve worked for twice had approved of their ‘discreet tactics and quick delivery’ and wanted them to take care of another one. Actually, Tony cheated quite a lot on both of those bounties. Finding out that one of the artifacts was legally obtained, Tony had contacted the current owner, bought it for less than the cost of the bounty, and recuperated his losses when he handed the ancient statuette over. For the second one, a stolen clay figurine, he had FRIDAY and her orb pick up the box it was in and fly to safety. Fortunately for Tony, this bounty was for a legally obtained artifact.
Not wanting to lose a customer, no matter how shady, Tony went through his contacts, searching for one that could perform the bounty for him. The conversations he had with each of his ‘acquaintances’ were odd.

“Oh, you can’t? Too far away? Wait- why the kriff are you on Coruscant? Don’t they have about fifty separate bounties on you?”

“Hey, Haiyo? Oh, it’s me, Tony. I have a bounty that I- Huh? Have you tried turning it off and on? ...Well, try it. If not, open the back panel… Yeah, the back panel is in the back.”

“Hey, this is Tony- No, no, no! Don’t kill anyone! Why, why would you-”

“Hi, this is Tony Stark, from- Yeah, that Tony Stark. I have a favor I want- What? You’ve met me before. We had a perfectly civil conversation. Why the kriff do you want my autograph?”

“Hi, I’m a perfectly normal bounty hunter that wants to ask a favor from yo- My name? I am… Tiny Stank… He hung up on me. He hung up on me!”

“This is Tony, we met at a BHG office two months ago- Wrong number? Oh, okay. Sorry about that.”

Having exhausted his very few bounty hunting contacts, Tony turned towards his non-bounty hunting contacts, ones that were not royalty or Jedi. The first one up was Colton, the pilot of the crashed ship when he met the Organas. Considering the hero-worship the Alderaanian had for Tony and the way FRIDAY had reported that he followed the Y-not’s progress over StarkNet, Tony thought that the fanboy had the most chance of agreeing to cash in the bounty for him.

“Colton, I know you’re not a bounty hunter, but can you please help me out with a favor?”

Luckily for Tony, Colton was agreeable enough to buy the artifact, pick up it up from Tepasi - quite literally one jump from Alderaan - and drop it off on Anaxes. The excitable Alderaanian even offered to do it for free because of the ‘life debt’ he had. Tony insisted that there was no such debt and told him to keep the profit. With that, Tony signed off, feeling a pang of loss and missing Peter Parker more than ever.

Frowning when he realized that Paramexor had read his message and decided not to reply to him, Tony decided to take matters into his own hands.

::This is not a joke. It nearly killed my crew. Who set up the trap?::

That sent, he headed to the bridge of the ship to do his own research on the trap. “Hope you don’t mind. I need your terminal for research purposes,” Tony told Fett as he breezed past him in the hall. The other bounty hunter turned to stare after him, narrowing his eyes. “Use your words,” Tony told him.

“What are you doing?” Fett asked when it became clear that Tony would not tell him anything without prompting.

“Oooh, full sentence! I can’t believe you said more than three words,” Tony said.

He went to a free terminal, looking up ancient artifacts that spewed out dangerous ooze. Unsurprisingly, there were zero hits. It was a long shot anyways. Tony tapped on the terminal impatiently as he considered what to do next.

Lifting up his StarkPad, he found pictures that Galee or FRIDAY had taken of the artifact and
posted on StarkWeb. Isolating the pictures, he fiddled with the contrast and brightness until several lines of etchings became clear. Taking those

It quickly became clear that the language and Basic had diverged from the same root language. However, due to the sheer volume of other languages that had evolved from Mid-Galactic Standard, it was not quite as simple for Tony to decode.

Leaving the terminal shifting through extinct and non-extinct languages and writings, Tony opened a separate page to research the metal-eating fungi itself. Surprisingly, or perhaps not-so-surprisingly, Tony had much more immediate success with that search. There were some isolated worlds with a few species of bacteria that caused accelerated rusting. But what mostly caught Tony’s attention was the world Halruun Kal.

Halruun Kal was a planet in the Mid Rim, not too far away from Naboo. Its claim to fame was the fact that all its natives were Force-sensitive. In fact, the kid they sent to the Jedi Temples - Mace Windows or something - had just became a Jedi Master earlier in the year.

Though he was not quite sure where he stood on the fact that another mind-reader graduated mind-reading college, Tony offered the guy a mental congratulations. Immediately after, he thought of Wanda as loudly as he could, repeatedly thinking, ‘Don’t mess with people’s minds, don’t mess with people’s minds.’ Hopefully, Windows would hear it with his Force voodoo and proceed to become a nice mind-reader that did not, in fact, mind-read. Hey, Tony could hope.

However, what was Halruun Kal’s claim to infamy happened to be the fact that it boasted several species of both silicate-eating fungi and metal-eating fungi. One of them happened to have a ‘surprisingly quick’ reproduction rate and ‘hues that vary from dark brown to green.’

Bingo.

The information on the fungus was sparse - the Halruunians or whatever they were called did not exactly have terminals scattered around their planet, but from what Tony could scrounge up, the species of fungi destroyed entire spaceships in a matter of days.

Days, not hours.

Unconvinced, Tony contacted one of the researchers that had updated the HoloSite, quickly charming her. An hour later, he had many different fungi DNA files, while purple Twi’lek received data on Ryloth’s many desert bacteria in return. She promised him more data on Halruun Kal at a later date, if he needed it, while he offered her some theories about the evolution of Datoonine’s evolution. It was a scientist’s form of flirtation, at its finest.

Sometime while he contacted the very nice Twi’lek, Galee crept in to contact her friends. The Twi’lek scientist that Tony had been talking to seemed very put off by the sounds of giggling coming from Galee’s corner, curtly saying her goodbyes and cutting the transmission.

Though she said sorry, Galee did not seem very apologetic. Nonplussed, Tony shrugged and headed to the cabins, finding Shoragg’s dirty decontamination suit and swabbing off some of the fungi that still clung to it.

Not being a scientist, and having stolen the starship itself from a band of pirates, it was unsurprising that Fett did not have any DNA mappers on board. That did nothing to deter Tony, who simply stole some of the scanners off of the walls and converted them to something usable.

While the numbers were crunching, Tony decided to do a round with his crew, even though it was
what passed for night - everyone was sleeping. No one seemed comfortable in the furnished cabins, nicknacks still scattered about as if their occupants were about to walk in.

Instead, he found Bai-Gon and Quinton on the floor of the hallway, leaning on each other and dozing peacefully away. The Aleenas were in a large pile of limbs on the rec room’s couch. On the loveseat, Suffee was leaning on the right arm, fast asleep, while Charell was on the left arm.

On the other side of the rec room, on a pile of sheets Gis was asleep with Hoviv’s five-year-old sister, Kovlo a few inches away. Greer was face-down at one of the tables.

As Tony turned around in preparation to find Kristoff and check in on Shoragg’s family, Galee came in and looked around. She waved at him, then frowned at the look on his face. “You don’t have to check on us. You and Suffee both already did a role call, right after we evacuated, remember?”

“I have a feeling that something’s wrong, y’know? That ‘shivers down my spine,’ ‘someone’s walking on my grave’ feeling?” Tony looked at her anxiously.

Galee looked back up at him, thoughtful. “I usually have more of a ‘don’t buy that, it’s not your color, no matter how good it looks on the mannequin’ kind of feeling. Do you want me to stay up with you?” she offered.

“No, it’s okay. We need you alert tomorrow,” Tony said, declining her offer.

“Well, if you need me, you know where to find me,” Galee said with a wink. She walked over to the loveseat, nudging Charell to lean over on Suffee. Galee wiggled into the small gap between Charell and the arm of the loveseat. “What?” she asked, spotting Tony watching her. “Did you really think I was really going to sleep on the floor?”

“No, I guess not,” Tony said, smirking. “You’re more of the type to bully people into giving you space with pungent perfumes and glitter bombs.”

“Glitter bombs?” Galee asked.

“Obnoxious little things. Glitter gets everywhere. I’d make you some, but I’m afraid you threaten the Y-not with them whenever you want to stay on Croissant longer.” Tony held back a wince. DUM-E gotten his claw onto some glitter back in their college days. Tony still found glitter in his joints, from time to time.

“Coruscant,” Galee automatically corrected, to Tony’s quiet guffaws. She quickly shushed him, pouting. “Hey! If you don’t stop laughing, I’ll make a glitter-mural on your wall!”

Tony raised his hands in surrender. “I give!” Tony said. He shook his head and turned away, trying to hide his smile. “Goodnight, Galee.”

“Night, Tony,” Galee murmured, settling back. “In all seriousness, though? I would really, really like a glitter-gun. People would think twice if they knew how troublesome glitter was.”

Actually, that idea had merit. With all the little gears and nooks inside the technology everyone seemed to surround themselves with, glitter could be an annoyance. In fact, it could be downright lethal if the right ingredients were near certain types of power cells. Tony made note to test it out. Flammable glitter? Explosive glitter? Or… metal-eating glitter, perhaps? And the humiliation factor alone would make Tony want to create such a gun, even without the enhancements.

Tony glanced back as he stepped back into the hall, nearly stepping on Bai-Gon. The two cousins
had slid down in the time he was in the rec room, both now laying on the ground, sort-of-but-not-really cuddling.

“Aw…” Tony said, pulling out his StarkPhone and taking pictures for blackmail purposes. He peeked back into the room he just left, snapping a picture of Gis and the little Rodian, then of Galee, Charell, and Suffee. He left before Galee could threaten him, remembering to step over Bai-Gon’s legs.

There were two doors that had lights on. The first one led to the kitchen. Kristoff and Fett were in there, playing an intense and dirty game of sabacc. Neither men looked up at Tony’s arrival. In the three minutes that Tony stood and watched the game, both Kristoff and Fett cheated twice that Tony could spot. As Tony turned to go, he spotted Fett switching out the dice with another one he had hidden in his palm. After he rolled, Kristoff reached over to shove Fett’s shoulder, discreetly sliding a pill into Fett’s whiskey. When Kristoff looked up to wave at Tony, Fett switched their cups.

“Stark,” Fett said, inclining his head.


“Ha! No last names for me,” Kristoff said, looking pleased, though whether it was because of being acknowledged by his first name or because of the card he snuck out of his sleeves undetected was debatable.

Taking advantage of Kristoff’s distraction, Fett reached out and checked the next few cards in the stack, reordering them to his preferences. “Solo,” Fett said.

Trusting that Kristoff and Fett were, in fact, friends and not enemies, Tony thought it safe to leave them unattended. They weren’t little kids, after all.

Down in the last occupied room, the med bay, Tony found Shoragg’s wife, his ten-year-old daughter, and Hoviv by Shoragg’s still form. The pirate ship that Fett had taken over was by no definition well-stocked. There had only been two bacta patches, not nearly enough for even the mildest of Shoragg’s injuries.

Tony covered the two children with the tablecloth, a poor excuse for a blanket but better than nothing.

“No more.”

Tony jumped, looking around. His eyes fell on Shoragg’s wife. “Excuse me, ma’am?” Tony asked politely.

“No more,” she said quietly, multifaceted eyes burning with some emotion. “I will not have our children carted around while my husband fulfills some lust for adventure.”

“I’m sorry,” Tony said. “I’ll be careful, next time. I-”

“There won’t be a next time!” she hissed, her voice brimming with anger as she stepped toe-to-toe with him. “Do you know what it is like? Every day, on Nar Shaddaa, waiting to be robbed, fearful for my children’s life? I thought it was going to get better, with you, but no! Time and time again, my husband has been in the thick of blaster fire. ‘It’s fine,’ I thought. ‘My sweetheart is strong! He will survive.’ Then, when I thought it couldn’t get worse, once again, my children were in danger!” With that last cry, she burst into tears.
“I… I’m sorry,” Tony said, not knowing what to do. He thought of Pepper, so scared and worried for him every time he put on the armor. But he had an excuse - he was ‘saving the world.’ What was Shoragg doing? Being a bounty hunter.

“Mom?” asked Hoviv’s sister.

“Hey, it’s going to be alright,” Tony said softly, closing his arms around her in a hug. “He’s going to be alright. It’s okay, kids. Go back to sleep.” Noticing the nasty glare Hoviv was giving him, Tony added, “Don’t worry, kid. I’m not trying to steal your mother.”

“When my husband wakes up, he will choose. Me and the children, or you and your crew,” Shoragg’s wife muttered stiffly, dabbing at her eyes with her sleeves.

“He’s going to pick you and his kids,” Tony said confidently. “How is that even a choice? You know Shoragg loves you.”

“You are a very easy, yet very hard man to hate, Tony Stark,” Shoragg’s wife said.

“Thanks?”

“Please leave.”

“Right, okay.” Tony let go and took a step back. After making sure she was not going to come after him, he took another step back. Then another.

Heading to the box he retrieved from his workshop, he went to an abandoned room near the back of the ship and assembled the Iron Maiden armor. He carefully inserted a hyperdrive and placed some shielding on it. Lastly, he programmed it on a course around the Mid Rim, combing through the HoloNet and local servers as it went. If FRIDAY was trapped in a file somewhere, he had faith that Iron Maiden would find her.

He took the FRIDAY-Orb and pressed record. “Friday, if- when, \emph{when} you get this, I give you full permission to visit Bail before you come bac. There’s a Holomatter generator installed in this now. Don’t get it damaged. I’m not sure how well I can replicate it,” he warned. He wrapped it in a polishing cloth and placed it in the helmet of the Iron Maiden armor.

Checking to see if the coast was clear, Tony had the armor follow him to a escape latch. “Here goes nothing,” he muttered, pulling the lever that opened the latch. He closed it a second later. Iron Maiden escaped into the depths of space.

“What happened?”

Tony spun around to see Fett with his arms crossed. “How did you know I was here?”

“This is my ship. I was alerted when someone opened one of the external doors,” Fett said neutrally.

“Oh,” Tony said. “I was trying to find Friday. My AI,” he clarified, walking past Fett. He went back to inspect his slime DNA, somehow picking up Kristoff on the way.

“This is the thing that nearly killed us, huh?” Kristoff asked, peering down at the petri dish. He sounded remarkably sober for a man that was supposedly drugged. Tony glanced at Fett, wondering if Kristoff had switched it back.

“I’m not stupid enough to drink while Kristoff is around,” Fett said lowly, raising an eyebrow.
“Ten and a half words. That has to be a new record,” Tony commented.

Fett scowled, but it was Kristoff who answered. “Don’t be an a**,” he retorted.

“It’s my default mode. I’m apparently very easy to hate, except not,” Tony said.

“Who said that?” Kristoff asked suspiciously. “One of your a***** ex-teammates?” He scowled, but Tony just waved his hand, bringing up the files and comparing the DNA. He glanced over at the two other men, seeing that neither of them knew what to make of the data.

“Someone was trying to kill us. The fungus on the ship? It used to be a species from Halruun Kal. Then, someone weaponized it. See this right here?” Tony pointed at the end of a DNA strand.

“Someone spliced bacterial DNA in. It made the fungus reproduce quickly, but it also made the DNA unstable at the same time. That’s probably the only reason why we survived for long enough for Fett to pick us up. Thanks for that, by the way.”

“Are you going to let them get away with it?” Fett asked neutrally.

“Not a chance,” Tony scoffed. “Wake Suffee for me, will you, Kristy? If we’re going to be a team, she needs to know this.”

“Aye, aye, captain!” Kristoff made a complicated salute and left, leaving Fett and Tony alone in the room.

“So, how was your month? Other than stalking ships, what did you do? Steal some targets from right under any rookie bounty hunters lately?” Tony jibed.

Instead of answering, Fett typed the password onto a datapad and handed it to him. Confused, Tony took it and started flipping through. The first couple pages were of Iron Man; there were paragraphs upon paragraphs of possible weaknesses and ways to take Iron Man down. Tony had to struggle to keep his face blank when he realized that a few of them were certainly possible. Unfortunately for him, it got worse.

There were dates and coordinates, of both Iron Man and Tony himself. He listed where each crew member was and StarkNet posts like Galee’s ‘Shopping with Suffee and Charell! Tony wouldn’t go. He never hangs out with us anymore!’ and Hoviv’s ‘No idea where Stark holed up in this time,’ complete with the dates and timestamps of each. He even noted some of Tony’s and Kristoff’s purchases of raw metal and correlated the repulsor claws from Coruscant to the repulsors on Iron Man.

Tony looked up, mouth dry. As if to add insult to injury, Fett drew up security footage that was taken just minutes ago, footage that clearly showed Iron Maiden following him down the hall.

Clearing his throat, Tony asked tiredly, “What do you want?”

“You free slaves,” Fett said.

“Yes,” Tony answered, finding no reason to deny it. Fett had all the data anyways - he already knew the answer. "What do you want?"

“I want in.”

“Wait, what?”

-Insert Quote Here-
Tony looked up, reading the identification number. Colton. He could really use some good news. With this in mind, Tony picked up the transmission, ready to hear Colton babble on about something or the other that could have captured his interest during the very short journey.

However, when the transmission connected, the excitable pilot Tony had gotten to know over the months was nowhere to be seen. Well, that was not quite correct. Colton was physically there, but the cheerful mood Tony was expecting was not present. In fact, the atmosphere the inventor was met with was downright somber, filled with a crackling tension that Tony could make out even from the other side of the screen.

Colton was in the cockpit of some spacecraft, smaller than a shuttle, but much larger than a starfighter. The lights were dim, leaving Colton illuminated by some overhead light to the man's left. Sitting stiffly on the pilot’s seat, Colton stared fixedly to his right, his face casted in shadow.

“Colton?” Tony asked, alarmed by the usually perky man’s silence.

“I’m sorry, sir. I failed. I wasn’t able to get the artifact,” Colton said, his crisp manner nearly hiding his hoarse voice.

Tony tilted his head, listening to the rasp in Colton’s voice. It was a roughness that came from screaming and crying. “That’s alright, buddy. You tried. It’s no big deal.” He turned his head slightly to try and catch the much younger man’s eye, though it was no use. The silence stretched on. The starship rumbled threateningly, and Colton flinched. “Colton, what’s wrong?” Tony demanded, suddenly very worried.

Colton returned to his odd position, scanning the right side of the ship. Every so often, his gaze would land on Tony. “They never planned on selling the artifact to you,” Colton said conversationally.

Something in the younger man’s inflection was undeniably wrong. The hairs on Tony’s arms stood on end. “Colton?”

“There were bounty hunters waiting for you.” The Alderaanian shrugged. “They got me instead.” The one eye Tony could see gazed at Tony speculatively.

“Are you okay? What did they do to you?” Tony leaned forward, watching as Colton’s left eye darted everywhere, not pausing for more than a second. Loss of concentration? Trouble focusing? “Do you have a concussion? Head injury of some sort?” Unless they were still following him and Colton was trying to keep an eye out for them... “Are they still after you?”

Tony’s fingers flew over the console as he tried to pinpoint where the transmission was coming from. It was taking too long for Tony’s comfort. Too bad FRIDAY was...

No. Concentrate.

Meanwhile, the pilot’s gaze returned to Tony. “They were... friendly enough. I wasn’t the one they wanted, after all.” Smiling a humorless smile, the younger man tilted his head, gaze distant. “They warned me away from you, told me several of their friends got killed because of you,” Colton said lightly. Every word of his seemed measured, following that strange diction. Something was off.

“How did you get away?” Tony asked warily. It drew Colton’s attention back to him. “Colton?”

“I didn’t get away. They let me go.” The tip of Colton’s lip curled upward, forming something that was not quite a smile, but not quite a sneer. “They took something very important away from me and let me go.”
Tony’s stomach dropped. “Colton… What did they take from you?”

Colton considered him for a long moment, He looked to the right for a long moment before turning his gaze back on Tony. The single eye Tony could see darted across Tony's face, looking for something. Then slowly, deliberately, Colton tilted his head left, the light falling on his face at a new angle. For the first time, Tony properly saw the right side of Colton’s face. Instantly, his stomach rebelled.

There was an empty, bloody socket on Colton’s face.

Because Colton’s right eye was gouged out.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, can I have some Marvel fans expound on this? Someone somewhere said that Wakanda's advancements are because of the large supply of Vibranium, etc., and that it was in pretty much everything - from clothing (Black Panther suit), to weapons, to tech, to medicine. Would someone really quickly explain to me why/how there's metal in medicine? This isn't supposed to be disparaging BP; I just want to know if it's viable for Tony to make medicine with Phrik or other SW metals.

Also, not really related to this story, but since Shuri was said to have a hand in the creation of pretty much every technological thing in the BP movie, does that mean that the Wakandians were as advanced as the rest of Africa/the U.S./the world before she came along? Okay, I haven't actually watched that movie either, but I really, /really/ wanna know.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Stuff happens.

Chapter Notes

I woke up early this morning, early enough to see the sun rise, sending yellow light scattering across the room. It was beautiful, and I felt so happy just to be alive. I felt energetic, from my head to the tip of my fingertips, like I wanted to bounce and run around, yet, at the same time, I wanted to just lay there forever. Have any of you ever felt like that?

Instead of running around and singing, I just plopped myself in front of my laptop and did an overhaul of this chapter, mashing it up with chapter 21 to make an extra-long chapter! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The horrified look on Tony’s face must have amused Colton, because the kid’s mouth twisted into something that was half a smirk, half a sneer. Colton's hand did an odd spasm, then, quick as a whip, the Alderaanian’s mood changed. His unexpected mirth disappeared as his eyes narrowed in a glare. “Because of you, I was tortured. Because of you, I thought I was going to die. For a moment, I wanted to die. Because of you, I’ve lost an eye,” Colton snarled. The stress in his voice was real, but the diction was measured, rehearsed.

The reassurances, the empty words and promises, they all withered and died on the tip of Tony’s tongue, forever unspoken. What could he say in the face of all that? He knew that there were people who were not exactly pleased with either of his personas, yet he sent a civilian directly into the line of fire.

Tony’s silence only served to enrage Colton, who probably took it as a sign of indifference or worse, an admission of guilt. “This is your fault, isn’t it? I’ll get you for this. You, the bounty hunters, everyone involved. I’ll get you all!” Colton paused there, leaning close to the screen and panting for a breath.

Half stunned by the Wanda-esque rant, Tony stared. The witch had blamed Tony for her parents being killed and been out to get him ever since. Colton was exuding the same creepy, unhinged vibes. Unlike Wanda, though, Tony was at fault for what Colton went through.

“Colton, I know that words can’t change this, but for what it’s worth, I’m sorry,” Tony said quietly, watching as Colton glanced wildly to the left and right.

Hysterical giggles escaped Colton's lips. The snickers grew louder until his whole body shook with mirth. Then, he flinched and looked back up. “You did this to me!” Colton spat out, his voice ringing. His eye was opened wide and he was trembling again.
Tony flinched back at the words themselves, but forced himself to look past them. He had always thought that actions meant more than words. As bitter as the short statement was, how it was intended to cut and wound, the body language, the very tone used was something else. But what? Tony’s eyes darted back and forth over Colton’s face. The kid was hunched in and trembling again, his left hand and arm spasming. Was it fear, a crushing sense of your life falling apart and nothing being the same? But his gaze was unfocused, distant - Maybe it was loss, a sense of broken hero-worship. Was it a plea, a question of why? Tony just needed another moment - he was so close to the answer.

Like he somehow felt it, Colton looked up again, eyes wide. His eyes flicked to the right once, but other than that, they remained fixed on Tony.

The sound of shattering ceramic broke them out of their impromptu staring contest - Tony still shocked and pained, Colton challenging but pleading. Colton’s gaze darted behind him, demeanor instantly darkening.

Whatever connection was between them snapped. Tony felt the loss, an almost tangible feeling. He whipped around to see what had created the noise.

Galee was at the door, Fett behind her. What looked like the remains of a mug was on the floor by Galee’s foot. “Oh, Force,” Galee bit out, looking horrified. “You… You did this to him?” she parroted. Ignoring the other two people in the room, Fett merely stared at the screen behind Tony with narrowed eyes.

“Guys, this isn’t what it looks like!” Tony said defensively, raising his hands. He briefly considered his words and tried to correct himself. “Well, unless it looks like someone is missing an eye, so... it isn’t as bad as it looks?”

Even Fett gawked at him at those words.

Tony winced at the way he phrased things and glanced back at the screen, which had gone dark. Colton had disconnected. “It’s very bad, and sort of my fault, but I didn’t do it on purpose?”

“You accidentally made someone lose an eye?” Fett said dryly.

“...Yes?” Tony ventured. Galee made a small, shuffled movement, like she wanted to leave the room, but to her credit, she stayed. “I… They wanted to get me, but the ship… I sent Colton instead.” Galee laid a cautious hand on his shoulder. It was meant to be reassuring, but Tony wanted nothing more than to shove it off.

“What are you going to do about it?” Fett asked.

Despite the casual way Fett said it, Tony had a feeling that he was being tested in some way. But what was being tested? His moral compass? Problem-solving skills? Tony brushed all the stray thoughts aside and answered honestly. “I was hoping you’d allow me to use your ship to track down his. Then… I guess I help him out. I don’t know. I just know that I have to make things right. So, what do you say? Let me use your spaceship?”

Fett gave him an inscrutable look. Tony guessed that he must have passed Fett’s impromptu test, because the more experienced bounty hunter gave a sharp nod and leaned back against the wall. Tony wasted no time misusing the navigation system to pinpoint Colton’s last known location, discreetly shrugging off Galee’s hand. Using basic geometry to calculate the trajectory from Tepasi, Tony employed basic logic and ‘educated guesses’ to decide that Colton was going back to Alderaan. He input the coordinates, hoping that the pirated ship would be quicker that whatever
vessel Colton would be using. Sometime during that time, Galee left.

“Why are you still here?” Tony asked without looking behind him.

“You free slaves. When is the next time?” Fett said instead of answering. Or perhaps he did answer.

Tony sent him a hard look. “The next time we get a bounty on a planet with slaves.”

“That could be a while,” Fett commented, giving a pointed glance at the screen that had shown Colton’s face.

“Well, that’s when Iron Man will be appearing,” Tony said sharply. Through the reflections caught by the shiny metal of the terminal, he saw Fett’s eyes narrow and realized that it was not the best approach he could have used. “Look,” Tony said with a sigh, briefly wiping at his eyes and forehead with his sleeve, “you saw what happened to Colton, and he was just an acquaintance of mine. I can’t leave my crew.”

“Can’t or won’t?” Fett asked simply.

Tony struggled to keep the disgust off his face as he looked back at Fett. “They are my friends,” Tony stated incredulously, wondering what kind of person Fett actually was, to be willing to leave people who were like family behind during times of high alert.

Fett looked back, unimpressed. “Do you not trust them to look after themselves? For a mere day?”

“These people are like a second family to me. I can’t - I won’t risk them,” Tony declared.

“I’m curious. What do you do for a living?” Fett asked abruptly. Before Tony could answer, he continued, “I was under the impression your crew took on bounties. You get shot at on a semi-daily basis. You are looked down upon, hindered on every planet you land on, whether or not you have a bounty. And yet, you believe your crew is safer on the ground, in potentially fatal battles, than on a cloaked, heavily armored ship hidden in an undisclosed position in space.”

Tony’s mouth twisted. “That was just a job. This is personal. Someone is out to get me for revenge.”

“There seems to be a lot of people out for revenge. The Hutts, various slave owners, these bounty hunters… Colton,” Fett said casually. “I’ve even heard that you and Solo had it out for each other for a while. One has to wonder exactly what… qualities… someone has to be so easily hated.”

“Part of my charm,” Tony deflected.

“This isn’t a game. They aren’t going to stop,” Fett said tersely. “The pressure on Iron Man? It will only increase. You’re cocky. Overconfident. You haven’t been beaten yet, and that makes you arrogant. You can’t let it get to your head. You need to fight now, while they are still unprepared. Your armor has holes. They will be exploited.”

Positive criticism. That was new. Tony did not appreciate the potshots at his ego or the reference to Colton, which was still raw. Still, Fett had kept it strictly in this universe, leaving out everything from Earth out of it. Tony appreciated that, at least. Sighing, Tony looked at Fett. “Look, I know I haven’t made the best first impression. Force, I probably look like a loose cannon to you, but please, can you judge me by the things I actually did, not the things you thought I did?”

Fett looked a little put-out at the way his little speech was received, but he recovered quickly,
giving Tony a nod. “I thought you were the beskar’verd that freed slaves,” Fett tossed over his shoulder as he slapped the control panel by the door.

Tony blinked. Beskar… That was a metal, right? He had no idea what ‘verd’ was, but he was pretty sure the bounty hunter just made a reference to Iron Man… Did Fett just try to make a joke? Because that was a lame one.

“Hey, wait up!” Tony called after him. He jogged lightly to reach Fett’s side. He expected the other bounty hunter to slow down, but Fett did not. Cursing tall people in his head, Tony continued jogging to keep up with Fett. “Want to hit the gym, training mat or whatever? I’d like to see your fighting style.”

“So you can figure out my weaknesses and take me down?” Fett asked dryly. Tony glanced over but found no indication as to whether or not it was a serious thought or another ‘joke.’

“No, actually,” Tony said, wondering if he was about to make a mistake. “I want to see what kind of armor to make for you.”

Fett actually stopped at that. “You want to make me armor,” he stated tonelessly.

“Yep!” Tony said cheerfully, glad to catch the other guy off-guard.

“I don’t need it,” Fett said. He continued walking.

Tony was flabbergasted. Other than Ross and several military men who wanted ‘Iron Patriot’ to carry more weapons, no one had a complaint against his armor - the person in it, maybe, but never the armor itself. “Hey, now! Have you seen the Iron Man armor in action? We can make you another one, with mods to fit your fighting style. It’ll be cool! You’d love the firepower.”

“My armor is sufficient. I neither need or want another.” Fett hit another control panel, sliding the door shut in Tony’s face.

“Rude,” Tony muttered.

-On Alderaan, they received bad news, then worse news. Despite the loss of depth perception, an inevitable side effect to losing an eye, it appeared that Colton had no trouble landing his ship in the mountains. The Maiden’s Flight was safely nestled in a small clearing that Tony would not have thought was big enough to hold her. Tony ran the calculations. What they said was that, even when shaken and with the loss of his eye to boot, Colton was an exceptional flier, perhaps even better than Kristoff.

The Maiden’s Flight was abandoned, completely stripped of all the goodies. Her owner was nowhere to be found. None of the hospitals or clinics within fifty miles reported a man with a missing eye. Fett reluctantly tracked Colton’s footprints, but they disappeared off a cliff after two miles. None of the crew believed that the pilot committed suicide, so they assumed that Colton was off making dastardly plans and gathering resources to use against them.

So basically, Tony had a dude who could outfly any of his crew on a revenge quest to take him down, and possibly his crew with him. Nice. And that was just the bad news.

The worse news?

The analysis of the metal-eating finished. Well, that was decidedly not the worse news. The worse
news was that it was, in fact, a variant of one of Halruun Kal’s species. Specifically, a genetically modified one. Someone purposely weaponized it and targeted the Y-not as easy pickings.

Tony was decidedly not happy about it.

“Um, is there something wrong?” asked Kristoff cautiously.

A better question probably would be what wasn’t. Shoragg had been immediately transported to a hospital upon arrival to Aldeeran. Tony and Shoragg’s wife were hammering out the details to Shoragg’s future career at SI - something high-paying, low-risk, and stable.

Besides the loss of a teammate and Gis’s playmate, FRIDAY was lost to the wind. Colton’s fate was up in the air. He had people gunning for his crew. His one ally that knew anything was practicing radio silence.

Tony glanced up from where he was aggressively spearing his raviolis and stabbing his greens. He glanced to his right, where Suffee had frozen with a fork raised halfway to his mouth, warily watching Tony’s knife flashing inches from his forearm. Then, he looked to his left, where there was a large space left by Greer, who was in the process of scooting away from him. Eyes back on Kristoff, Tony said darkly, “Due to a favor I requested of him, one of my friends just upped and disappeared after losing an eye and swearing revenge. What do you think?”

“Lighten up. I mean that guy’s missing an eye. Seriously, how bad can it be?” Kristoff said, unconvinced of the danger.

The limp ravioli dropped from Tony’s motionless fork. “What is wrong with you?” The engineer stared incredulously at the ex-smuggler. The whole table tensed and looked up in time to see Tony finish with, “Are you completely insane?”


Tony jabbed his fork at him. “You just tempted fate! You issued a challenge to the universe. You know how much the universe likes to screw with me. It’s not going to leave something like this unanswered! What the Force is wrong with you?”

Beside him, Suffee deflated. “Oh, it’s just that.” Losing concern over the conversation, the old Rodian returned to his vegetables. “Morons,” he muttered under his breath.

Catching it due to his enhanced hearing, Tony automatically replied, “I heard that.” He picked up his plate and wrapped it before shoving it into the refrigerator. “I’m done. It’s nothing you guys did. I just need to do something.”

Snagging one of his StarkPads, Tony brought up a portion of FRIDAY’s coding that she had said was bothering her. Something about incorrect interfacing with this universe’s codes. It was not FRIDAY herself, just some immobile pieces of her, like hair clippings off of a human. After drawing up some programs and modifying them to help out, Tony translated the piece of FRIDAY’s matrix copied down onto the pad into Standard Basic for fun. He quickly lost interest and looked about for another source of distraction.

Paramexor. Tony resisted the urge to pace back and forth. He was missing something, but what? His eyes fell on the other StarkPad, resting innocently next to his mug. He tapped it to turn it on.

::Do not take the bounty. Trap.::

It was Paramexor’s message, too little, too late.
It suddenly occurred to Tony that two separate, yet potentially fatal bounties were offered to his crew: the fungus and Colton’s trap. Despite that, Paramexor had written ‘bounty,’ not ‘bounties.’ So which of the attempts did he know about, and how?

Paramexor still had not answered yet, but when Tony found him, he would have a lot to answer for.

“Denevar,” Tony muttered, identifying where the message was sent from. Louder, he asked “Fett, are you going to kick us off your ship, or can we use it to fly to Denevar?”

-Insert Quote Here-

With both Alderaan and Denevar in the Core, you would’ve thought it would take a lot less time to navigate. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Being so close to Deep Core meant that there were lots more asteroids, planetoids, actual planets, and random space objects that posed danger when traveling at light speed. They had to stick to hyperspace lanes - down Commenor Run, hopping onto Hydian way, through some unnamed hyperspace lane, and finally switching over to Namadii Corridor. It took several hours, but was much faster than if they traveled in a straight line at sublight speeds.

“Southwest hemisphere?” Kristoff asked from the pilot’s chair.

Tony nodded absentmindedly. “Eighty-two miles north of Sector Four’s second-most populated city,” he clarified, accessing Denevar’s personal network. He was blown by the number of emergency reports, skimming them with increasing alarm.

“Like I know where that is,” Kristoff retorted, though he guided Black Fist into a smooth descent towards one of the planet’s larger continents, unaware at what Tony was seeing.

“That one?” Greer asked, pointing to a large stretch of chrome and grey that could be seen even from their altitude.

“Unfortunately, no,” Suffee said dryly from where he was trying to teach Greer how to read the map. “I’m guessing we are headed to that pillar of smoke.” Tony immediately stood up, walking towards the front to see with his own eyes the chaos that had befallen Denevar. It was not pretty. Buildings were being destroyed, yet none of the soot-covered figures below seemed to care, dodging between larger pieces and shooting at each other. Multiple colors of blaster bolts lit up the city, while starfighters danced dangerously low in the skies.

The Fist spun around and fired at two combating starfighters that flew too close, splitting them apart and scaring them away from the much-more armored starship.

“Kriff!” Kristoff snarled, hovering above a destroyed landing strip. He dodged anti-aircraft blasts and steered the Fist away. “What now, Tony?”

Those of the crew on the bridge turned to look at Tony with wide eyes. Tony was reminded that, despite their experience with scuffles and firefights, none of them had faced a city-wide crisis of any scale before. Tony swallowed, quickly running through their strengths and weaknesses.

“Okay, we need to land the Fist close enough to the fight to help out, but far enough that we don’t get caught in the crossfire.” At this, Kristoff gave a sharp nod and started circling the edge of the disaster. “Greer, you stay on board and protect the ship. Man the cannons. Any hostiles approach, you blast them to kingdom come. You too, Suff’.” The man did not understand the reference, but he got the general gist.

Tony walked to the PA system and spoke quickly. “The Paramexor’s base is under attack from a
rival bounty hunting guild, KSC. They don’t care about civilian casualties. We are helping clear out the city. Galee, I want you in charge of the med bay. Fixit’s got the complicated stuff covered, just do the non-critical wounds. Get some of the older kids to help out. Gis can help if anyone becomes combative. Charell, you get the injured civilians to Galee. Feel free to shoot anyone who tries to stop you. Aleena clan? I want you on the roofs, clearing the way for the Charell. Bai-Gon, Quinton, you guys get the uninjured civilians out of the city.”

As he spoke, Kristoff landed the ship on the remains of flattened building. “What about us heavy-hitters?” he asked jokingly.

“Kovlo, Kristoff, Fett? You’re with me. We’re going to fan out and take down as many of these suckers as we can.” Tony flipped his earpiece on and grabbed one of his experimental blasters. As he paused by Suffee’s chair, Tony placed a hand on the Rodian’s shoulder. “Suffee, I know you want to help out, but I don’t like the thought of you in the middle of this. Friday’s gone, so I need someone coordinating from here. Give Galee and Greer some backup, ‘kay?”

Suffee hesitantly nodded, not saying a word. Tony grabbed some of his experimental combat armors and left. Tony could still feel the Rodian’s eyes on him as he left the bridge, snagging a random StarkPad and wires, in case he had to hack something.

Fett was already at the ramp when Tony and Kristoff got there. The Mandalorian raised an eyebrow, and Tony realized his mistake. “Please,” he said. “I know I am not your leader, and I have no authority over you or your actions, but I would really appreciate it if you helped us out.”

“Fine,” Fett said, though all three men knew that he would have joined the combat either way. Tony checked the StarkPad, finding that it was the one with programs for FRIDAY. Tony was grateful - it was physically one of the strongest StarkPads he had, the back lightly coated in songsteel. Figuring that he might as well uses the extra armor, he strapped it onto his back.

“Just shoot at anyone in a brown uniform,” Tony told Kovlo when the Rodian joined them. He eyed Kristoff strangely when the ex-smuggler stole Fett’s jetpack, but since Fett did not say a word about it, neither did Tony.

Unfortunately for the group, ‘shoot at anyone in a brown uniform’ was much more complicated in execution. Brown was apparently a common color in the area, and Tony found himself aiming at fleeing civilians several times. The confusion was only added to as Suffee kept mistakenly sending orders meant for Charell or some of the other groups to Tony’s.

“Kriff it,” Tony said finally, as he jerked his blaster away from a brown-clad man who had rushed at a woman, only to hug her. “Get up, Kristina. Change of plans. We’re going to strike at the head.” He turned on his earpiece. “Suffee, move Borr to cover the hole in the perimeter. Kristoff and I are going to Paramexor’s base to end all this.”

“I am going, too,” Fett cut in before Suffee could reply.

“No, we need someone with Kovlo. I don’t like leaving my teammates without help close at hand.”

“Kovlo is a grown Rodian. He can take care of himself.”

“Still-”

“I don’t take orders from you.”

Tony paused. It was true. “Okay. Fine. Kristoff, you find Kovlo and stick with him, capisce?”
Kristoff grimaced and motioned to Tony to turn off his earpiece, which Tony promptly did. “Don’t take it personal, boss. I don’t know if you know this, but you didn’t hear this from me, okay?” He waited for Tony’s affirmative nod before explaining, “He spent some years as a slave. That’s how we met. Shared the same owner for a while. He has this thing against slavers.”

Tony filed the information away. It explained a lot of things. Seeing that Kristoff was still warily waiting for an answer, Tony answered, “You have a thing against slavers, too. So do I, for that matter. Heck, who doesn’t have a thing against them? I’ll be sure to knock a few heads for you.”

“I appreciate it,” Kristoff said with a nod. “Don’t make a big deal of it, you hear? He doesn’t want people to know.” He glanced over Tony’s shoulder and, without waiting for a reply, took off in the direction they knew Kovlo was in. Tony glanced behind to see Fett approaching, though he probably was too far away to have heard what Kristoff had said.

Wordlessly, the two bounty hunters fell in step, watching each other’s backs as if they had been doing it for months. Tony noted this with surprise. He thought that Fett, being a loner, would have trouble working with another person. Instead, Fett unhesitatingly trusted Tony to cover his weaknesses, doing the same to Tony’s. There were a few wrinkles, but this was definitely someone who Tony could picture Iron Man fighting alongside.

Despite this, it was getting harder and harder to navigate the broken roads. Four times, they had to backtrack when they reached dead ends and blocked roads. Twice, they were forced to retreat when they ran into groups of slavers that were more than the two men could safely handle. In moments like these, Tony wished FRIDAY was still there. Still, he had to get used to it. FRIDAY was leaving him for Bail, anyways.

Somewhere in front of them, a KSC starfighter was tugged down by gravity, hitting a building when it was unable to lift up in time, due to the differences between flying on a planet and flying in space. Those starfighters were not meant for prolonged atmospheric flight, and Tony wondered what idiot ordered them out there as another starfighter spiraled down and crashed to their left, sending sparks and smoke up into the air.

He and Fett blasted their way down two blocks, before being forced down a dead end alley to their left. Tony winced at the property damage when Fett managed to explode a line of speeders to cover their escape.

The alley was the resting spot of a downed starfighter, it’s pilot speared by a beam and barely keeping conscious. Due to the lack of a brown uniform, it was easy to deduce that he was either one of Paramexor’s men or part of Denvar’s peacekeeping force. The man, somewhere in his late twenties, at Tony’s best guess, tracked them through hazy eyes, still trying to staunch the blood seeping out from around the metal beam.

Fett mercilessly aimed his blaster at the man’s head.

Tackling Fett was automatic. “What do you think you’re doing?” Tony yelled, wrestling the Mandalorian to the ground. An elbow rammed into his nose, breaking the bone. Tony released Fett to clutch his nose, and the other bounty hunter rolled away, gun still out, though not aimed anywhere in particular. “’t kriff ‘ere you tinkin’?” Tony asked thickly as he adjusted the bones so they could heal correctly. “’s on our side.”

“It pierced his upper lungs, cutting though several important arteries and veins,” Fett said stoically, seemingly unbothered by what he had just attempted to do. “There are no surgeons near, and no way to get him to medical help. He will die slowly and painfully.” The bounty hunter turned away from Tony, as if that finished the argument, walking to the pinned man inside the starfighter and
placing his blaster at the man’s temple.

“Fett! Thop!” Tony yelled, taking his hand off his nose to fumble at his own blaster, uncaring of the blood now dripping onto his armored jacket. Fett looked back, eyes flashing dangerously. *I don’t take orders from you.* “What ‘bout him?” Tony gestured at the man straining to struggle away from Fett, though careful enough not to rip his wounds open further. “You’re takin *his* choice, his freedom, away from him!”

Fett paused at that. He turned to the dying man. “Do you wish to suffer?” he asked.

“I sure as H*** don’t want to be murdered by likes of you ,” the man whispered weakly, lips curling up into a pathetic snarl. Fett’s blaster dropped to his side, and he turned his back on the pilot to walk away.

Tony watched Fett investigate a building for handholds and start to climb. He turned back to the starship, spotting a crushed astromech attached to the back of the starfighter. An idea formed in his head and he felt the StarPad pressing down on his back as he crouched beside it. “Hey, little guy. I don’t think you’re going to last long. Want one last mission to save the city?” he asked.

The green and white astromech whirred sadly, turning its optic towards the cockpit.

“One sec,” Tony told it. With a pat on its head, Tony climbed up the broken starfighter to its dying pilot. “Hey, sorry about that. Do you want me to take a last message or final request or something? Also, I really need your droid to save the city and stuff. Can I have it?”

This close up, he could see what Fett already knew: the pilot was already dead, even if he did not know it. The man was already pale and shaking. With the amount of blood he was losing, Tony predicted that the man would be gone before five agonizing minutes passed.

He was unprepared for how the man’s eyes lit up the moment he focused on Tony.

“You’re… you’re him, aren’t you?” There was a feverish glint in the man’s eyes.

“What?” Tony squawked as a hand grabbed his arm with deceptive strength. Tony put his free hand over the pilot’s, ready to tear it off at the first sign of danger. “Dude, I don’t know what you’re talking about, but I need your droid. It’s important.”

“You’re Tony Stark,” the man whispered with awe. He tugged Tony closer.

‘Well, yeah…” Tony said. “Sir, the droid?”

“Take it. Don’t let them win. *Kill them all.*” He gave a bloodstained smile, and with that last, frankly alarming message, his grip slackened. Tony checked his pulse to make sure the pilot was dead. He returned to the astromech.

“He’s dead. And as weird as it sounds, I think he died happy,” Tony said with a shudder before he focused, pulling out his StarkPad and displaying it to the astromech. “I have some coding that I want to merge with yours. I don’t think you, like, you will survive it, but your powerpack is crushed - you’re going to die anyways. With this, the remnants of your base coding will form an AI with battle capacities. Want to avenge your owner?”

The astromech beeped determinedly, despite the fading light of its buttons. It opened a latch, displaying its port. Tony plugged in his StarkPad and uploaded as much as the astromech as he could before it died. Tony watched the StarkPad with fascination.
The two groups of coding faced each other, fighting for dominance. The numbers scrolled down the screen wildly, before one of the coding matrices triumphed, absorbing the other one. Tony connected it to his earpiece.

“Hello, Dr. Stark,” he heard a moment later. The voice was somewhat feminine, with a light Coruscanti accent.

“Hello,” Tony answered. “Do know who I am?”

“You are Anthony Edward Stark of Earth, inventing expert, genius, and my creator.”

Tony grimaced at the use of his full name. “Do you know who you are?”

There was a noticeable pause. “No. I do not.”

“Do you want to know?” Tony pressed.

“Affirmative. What is my designation?”

“Your name is Monday,” Tony answered. “Welcome to life.”

“Affirmative. What are my orders?”

“Have you accessed your files?” Tony waited for MONDAY to confirm she did before continuing, “Copy and merge Friday’s piloting folder, get Iron Man out of the Fist without being seen, and circle up to the north. Protect Paramexor’s base. And give me directions on how to get there quickly.”

“Affirmative. Calculating route.” Tony nodded, forgetting that there were no available cameras nearby. Using the holes Fett had stabbed into the wall, he scaled over the building. “No available routes,” MONDAY announced as Tony dropped down the building to the road, now clear of KSC slavers.

“Are you sure? The way looks clear to me,” Tony said, looking at the empty streets. Fett dropped down next to him. Tony noticed how tense the man was. “...Going back down here was a mistake, wasn’t it?”

“Affirmative. You are now surrounded.”

Fett snagged Tony’s shoulder and dragged him into a doorway as plasma ate the concrete where they had been standing a split second before. They exchanged glances and kicked down the door together. “Would’ve been better if you told be beforehand,” Tony hissed. The door behind them slammed open and he and Fett split to escape.

His earpiece crackled to life. “Stark, get under cover. I’m getting unstable readings from the room next door.”

Glancing around wildly, Tony wondered what Fett had meant by ‘get under cover.’ He was already behind a solidly built table, one that already survived several rounds of blaster fire. His sides were meagerly covered by scorched cushy couches. Sure enough, something in an adjacent room exploded.

Cutting pain laced up his leg as something cut through it. Biting back his scream into a strangled inhale, Tony curled up defensively.
Tony spared a desperate glance in the direction Fett should have been in - it would be terrible for his reputation if the one and only person he teamed up with, one of the most intimidating bounty hunters that ever existed, died during their first mission together. It was definitely not because he cared for the guy. Unfortunately for Tony, the other bounty hunter was nowhere in sight.

Ducking, Tony fired his blaster randomly over his makeshift barrier. Something exploded to his left and he heard Fett hiss faintly through the earpiece. “Fett, you still alive there?” Tony whispered.

“No,” Fett deadpanned, sarcasm evident even through the earpiece.

“Any plans? If not, I’m just going to call it a loss and summon an airstrike or something,” Tony said. He did not want to reveal his connection to Iron Man yet, but he was even less willing to die when he did not have to.

“Yes. Fight.”

“That isn’t a plan, Fett.” Tony fired at the ceiling, causing a large section of it to collapse on top of a pair of men who were shooting in the general area where Fett should be.

“Cover me. I will flank them from the left.”

Tony glanced to the left, a dead-man’s-land of rubble and beams. “Yeah, no, I’ll go. I have a higher chance of surviving, especially if I circle them from the right.”

“No. You don’t have enough experience.”

“I’m shorter. A smaller target,” Tony said with no little glee. His short stature was now an asset.

“You have a little girl waiting for you at home,” Fett said convincingly. Tony paused, reviewing all of his conversations with Fett to see if he had ever implied that FRIDAY was a human girl. Then, he realized how ridiculous they were, arguing about who should take a nearly suicidal role in the battle.

“...Just wait another minute. I’ll think of a better plan,” Tony said instead.

“Hurry up,” Fett said shortly. An explosion sent heavy, metal canister into the air. Fett, now that his cover was literally blown, tossed a smoke pellet down and did a fancy roll to Tony’s side. “Time’s running out,” Fett said, his voice coming from both Tony’s left and his earpiece. “I keep shooting to distract them, you go around them and set up explosives.”

Tony cast a guilty look at his leg, even as he shot a couple more blasts. “I’m not going anywhere.” At Fett’s nasty look, Tony quickly explained, “No- my leg. I can’t run. You have to play hero. I’ll be the bait.”

There was a very telling silence from the other bounty hunter. Fett downed at least two more of the enemy bounty hunters before he spoke again. “I don’t know how to set your bombs.”

It sounded like an accusation to Tony, even though he knew it was not. “Doesn’t matter. Hijack one of their transports. Run over a couple of them for me.”

“I don’t like leaving allies behind,” Fett said. Actions spoke louder than words, though- Fett turned and looked behind them for an exit. “Don’t get yourself killed.”

“You’ll get yourself killed if you don’t go already,” Tony said calmly. He glanced up at the ceiling
between Fett and the back exit. “The roof’s caving in,” he noted.

“Don’t die,” Fett ordered. He pivoted and crouched as he ran further into the building.

With Fett out of the way, Tony turned back to shooting the enemy bounty hunters, trying to hold them off long enough for Fett to work his magic. His quick reflexes and enhanced thought processes were a huge advantage, but his opponents had sheer numbers on their side. In a draw-
out battle, without his cache of SI gadgets or the Iron Man suit, Tony would lose.

That piece of information meant that Tony was delighted to see blaster fire coming from behind him, sizzling through the air to take down one of the men he was targeting. Tony was expecting to see Kristoff, or perhaps Kovlo. As it was, he was very put-off to turn and spy Fett sliding into place behind a refrigerator.

“I thought you’d be making roadkill by now,” Tony said accusingly.

“We’re surrounded. No way to sneak to the transports, not alone,” Fett reported.

“So… head to a more defensible corner, bunker down, and hope a miracle happens?” Tony suggested.

The Mandalorian tossed a grenade and several smoke pellets across the hallway. He turned to Tony and held out a hand. “Get up,” Fett ordered. “We get out of this together, or not at all.”

Confused, Tony reached up and grabbed it, not resisting as Fett pulled him up and slung Tony’s arm over his shoulders, nearly carrying him out of the room. Surely the Mandalorian did not plan to cross the open field with Tony hanging off him? They would be sitting ducks!

“Please tell me you’re not planning on lugging me all the way to the launch pad,” Tony said as Fett paused to close the door and jam it. As much as he did not want to die, he hated the thought of both of them dying even more.


“Ooo, issues! I’m sensing a long and tragic backstory,” Tony commented insensitively. His lack of tact did not even warrant a second glance from Fett, much to his annoyance. Tony wiggled, then went limp, causing Fett to stagger. “I think I’m fine here. I’ll stay by the window and cover your escape,” Tony offered.

“No.”

The two of them glared at each other, wasting valuable time as the smoke in the other room cleared. Tony could hear the enemy bounty hunters searching for them. “Be reasonable.”

“No. Non-negotiable.” There was a set look in Fett’s eyes, and Tony could see that his mind was made up. He gave a nod of acquiescence, and they limped down to the next hallway. The two bounty hunters rounded a corner, only to come face-to-face with around a dozen, obviously-hostile men. The opposing groups stared at each other for a long moment, before Fett let out what sounded like a Mandalorian curse and shot two of the men before Tony even withdrew his blaster. Before Tony could fire more than five shots, Fett was already dragging him back to the hall they had just left.

“Force, Force, Force,” Tony snarled, saying ‘Force’ with the vitriol most people on Earth would use to say a certain swear word beginning with the same letter. Beside him, Fett looked like he very much agreed with the use of the word.
“Ideas,” the Mandalorian stated rather than asked.

“I’ve summoned the armor. ETA one minute, twenty-one seconds,” Tony rattled off.

Just then, his earpiece chimed. “Orders overridden. Mark A II rerouted to northwest field to provide assistance to refugees,” MONDAY’s cool, automated voice reported.


“Negative, boss,” MONDAY stated. “Orders overridden. Mark A II is unneeded. Rerouting to scuffle at the northwest field.”

“What?” Tony asked, horror suffusing his voice. When he was writing the code, he did not put in the same limits and protocols that he had first tied down FRIDAY with. But now, MONDAY was overriding her orders, orders that his life depended on.

“A little help here?” Fett snapped, losing patience. He fired around the corner a few more times, only to stagger back as a blaster bolt slammed squarely onto his chestplate.

“Mark A II’s arrival is redundant. Sending resources to areas in need.”

A noise had Tony looking down the other end of the hall, where a lone man stood, firing at them. “Get your head out of your a** and shoot, you di’kut!” Fett snarled.

Tony whipped out his blaster and shot the man. It was a perfect shot. The man went down, a hole burned into the entire top half of his head. “Fett, they’re advancing from the back!”

“Then shoot them,” Fett said.

“Are we planning on having a back exit? ‘Cause if not, I’ll just block the door,” Tony offered.

“Do it.”

A second later, the ceiling above the door exploded. “One way out, now,” Tony commented lightly. He started to peek around the corner, only to jerk back, a bolt of plasma singeing his hair. Instead, he pulled off a metal plate off of the wall, looking appreciatively at the mirror shine. Sticking it out and using the reflection to aim, he shot several of the KSC slavers. “Charge them before more get here?”


The two leapt out, sprinting the distance between them and the slavers. Tony quickly pulled ahead. Then, the ceiling dropped on the slavers, making a ramp to the roof of the building.

A splash of hot pink and gold dropped down. Slowly straightening from the iconic three-point landing amongst settling dust and rubble like the avenging goddess she was, was the Iron Maiden.

“Hello, Dad. What is this I hear about a sister?”

Chapter End Notes

Longest. Chapter. Ever!
Anyways, this was a late update, so, as promised, I will update next week. Unlike usual, however, next update and the updates following that will also be on Thursdays or Fridays - my Tuesdays are getting too crowded.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Just two messed-up guys with trust issues the size of the non-existent Death Star, trying to get along and failing. And some fake engineering, false tactics, unnamed starfighters, comic book science, and a red herring...

Chapter Notes

Looks like I caught enough interest in my own works to add chapter summaries again. It's a little choppy since I removed a bit, placed it in my 'deleted scenes' folder, then thought better of it, dusted it off, and mashed it into the narrative with 1.5 sentences for transition. And I used a hyperlink. I think I failed. Ayyy, is it Friday the 13th?!

The sun rose behind the Iron Maiden armor, casting her in a halo. The birds sang an ode. Flying projectiles transformed in mid-air into fireworks and rose petals. Bounty hunters and slavers alike dropped their weapons to chorus in three-part harmony. Peace reigned and the world righted itself for the reunion of father and daughter.

Yeah, no.

That definitely was not the way things went. At all. Especially since they were still indoors.

The first thing that Tony noticed was that FRIDAY was fuming. The glowing eye slits on the suit’s mask might as well be spitting sparks as FRIDAY glared. A bounty hunter that appeared to glance down the hole FRIDAY created quickly retreated, hands held up. Fett, the traitor that he was, casually took a step away from Tony.

Friday. Tony mouthed her name, unspeakably glad to see his girl despite her obvious anger. Before he could gather the brain cells to actually say the words, FRIDAY was talking again.

“Why are you here?” FRIDAY asked bluntly. As Tony opened his mouth, FRIDAY added another question. “And does he know? If he doesn't, don't answer me verbally.”

At that, Tony's mouth snapped shut, because Fett was still under the impression that FRIDAY was 'a little girl.' For the first time, he realized that FRIDAY had been speaking to him through his earpiece since her dramatic entrance.

The Iron Maiden’s chin lifted. “I see.”

“Are you affiliated with Iron Man?” Fett asked, blaster pointed at the ground. He pointedly turned his head to look at Tony.

“Yes,” a robotic female voice resonated from the armor.
Fett waited, yet there was no more answers on the way. Realizing this, something in the Mandalorian’s eyes hardened. “Go on,” Fett said dismissively in a way that made Tony think that coming clean would have been a better choice. “There are slavers. Blast them. It is your objective, isn't it?” He walked past armor. “Coming, Stark?”

“Right.” Tony shook off… well, basically the last minute or so and plopped down on the rubble. He could feel Iron Maiden's sensors focus on him as he tugged on the shrapnel embedded in his leg. Tony hissed and let go as pain lit up his nerves. He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them and put his hand back on the metal, ready to try again. A pink gauntlet stopped him. Tony looked up at Iron Maiden's expressionless mask as FRIDAY directed the armor to hold Tony's knee with one hand and grasp the shrapnel with the other. Tony braced himself, screwed his eyes shut, and gave a nod. Iron Maiden yanked out the metal, smeared bacta on the wound, and wrapped his leg. "Thank you," Tony gritted out as soon as he could talk. He was given a curt nod before FRIDAY activated the thrusters and flew up.

Testing his leg and deciding that it was probably okay for him to walk, Tony used the rubble to climb out through the hole FRIDAY created and standing on the roof. He was hyperaware of the pink armor next to him, following the sensors and mask of Iron Maiden to where Iron Man was almost mechanically mowing down the hostiles by the dozens, about ten or fifteen blocks away. MONDAY was doing a good job, especially considering the fact that she was literally minutes old and that it was her first fight.

“I am Iron Man’s co-pilot. Not her.” In a smooth motion, Iron Maiden launched forward, blasting off towards Iron Man. That same moment, Iron Man wobbled dangerously in the air for a moment, before dropping in altitude. To all others watching, it seemed that Iron Man plummeted like a stone. Only Tony, with his enhanced vision, could see the minute twitches the suit made. Tony opened his mouth to scream, shout, or do something.

As suddenly as it started, it ended. Iron Man swooped up to meet his pink-colored counterpart and they spiraled around each other. In sync, the duo began eliminating their opponents without mercy. It was as if that episode never happened. The only true difference was the skill level of Iron Man. Mechanical before, Iron Man’s motions were now fluid in a way that spoke of experience and natural talent. Tony closed his mouth. FRIDAY was the more experienced AI at piloting the suit, after all. It was only logical that she took control.

A shot flew past, inches from Tony’s nose, shocking him from his thoughts. Tony followed its path as it unerringly struck a figure on an adjacent rooftop, one that had his own blaster aimed at Tony. He looked on his other side to see Fett hoister his blaster.

“You did that on purpose,” Tony accused, rubbing his nose. The Mandalorian merely raised an eyebrow. Pinching the bridge of his nose, Tony muttered, “Fine. I’ll tell you after this.” He put more weight on his injured leg and was rewarded with unpleasant tingling.

“No more secrets.”

“If I give up all my secrets, you have to give up yours, capisce?”

Fett stared at him for a long moment, then shook his head, looking away. He took off running along the roof, leaping to land on the roof of the next building over. Tony shook his head at the Mandalorian’s stubbornness, running after him. As he drew level with Fett, Tony presented his counteroffer.

“Fine, how about this - you explain why you were following us and I explain why Iron Man and his lovely companion is following me.” Tony offered. FRIDAY, who was listening in on the
conversation, gave a huff at the flattery.

Fett shot two figures emerging out of a window before he answered. “Agreed,” Fett said simply. They ran past, not sparing the motionless bodies a second glance. Fett jumped on the window ledge and used the grooves to pull himself up to a higher roof. Tony took the easier route of magnetizing his shoes to the metal walls to climb.

“And I’ll make you some armor so you can kick some serious a**,” Tony added, not above pressing his luck.

To his surprise, the other bounty hunter did not immediately protest, instead following the armors with his eyes. Even as he shot at two KSC members who were cornering one of Paramexor’s men, Tony watched as Iron Maiden began blasting all the KSC slavers that came near her with extreme prejudice. Even Fett seemed impressed - Tony caught him giving the pink-and-gold suit an admiring glance as FRIDAY guided it into a graceful spin, obliterating the next group.

“Charell or Suffee?” Fett said.

Tony misstepped, stumbling forward before he caught himself. “What?” Tony asked, barely able to keep the alarm from his voice. His hand flew to his earpiece.

“Suffee is assisting Galee with triage. Charell is approximately three blocks away from the Black Fist. Neither have critical injuries,” FRIDAY informed him, knowing exactly what he needed.

Fett cast Iron Maiden another look. “Charell?” he asked again. His eyes flicked to Iron Man. “Solo,” he stated, though from the look on his face, Tony could tell that Fett did not really think that Kristoff was piloting the suit.

“After,” Tony said slowly, frustration seeping into his voice, “I’ll tell you everything, after.” Why did everyone have tunnel vision? Steve and his Bucky-ing, Gis and his determination to get out and fight, Colton and his ‘I will kill you’ phase, everyone’s secrets, and now Fett! What now?

So caught up in his bemoaning, Tony missed the end of the rooftops and would have leapt out into open air if Fett did not grab his arm to yank him back.

Unfortunately, between enhanced Extremis jumps and pure Mandalorian muscles, Extremis won. The force of Tony’s leap brought them both over the edge. For a split second, Tony’s eyes locked into the ground.

Four stories.

That was how far they would have to fall.

Tony’s mind began spitting out statistics. Falling from thirty feet had a fifty percent chance of death. Fifty feet had a ninety percent mortality rate. Four stories was roughly forty feet. If it was a smaller height, Tony would have tried tucking and rolling. However, at forty feet, landing feet-first would be best, right? Broken legs were better than broken spines. But what about Fett? A fall from this height probably wouldn’t be enough to kill Tony, but what about a Mandalorian? Shoot, should he use himself as a cushion-

And that was about as far as he got before their fall stopped with a sudden jerk. He looked up to see Fett’s eyes bulge for a moment and his face whiten with pain. Tony followed the other man’s arm up to see that Fett was holding onto the ledge with his other hand. His grip was already slipping.

Dislocated shoulder, Tony knew immediately. The other man had to be in intense pain.
Tony looked down to see a ledge somewhat to his left. “Drop me,” Tony ordered. He was half glad, half disappointed to see Fett let go without question. After this fiasco, they would be having words about Fett’s apparent willingness to have him fall to his death.

Grabbing the top of the window, Tony swung in. He had just enough time to secure himself before Fett plummeted down. Hooking his arm around Fett’s waist, Tony hauled the Mandalorian into the room. Kriff, the man was heavy!

Despite his caution not to wrap his arm around Fett’s chest, he still jarred the man’s dislocated shoulder. He felt the man go rigid against him, but a split second later, any sign of it was gone. Fett rolled and landed on his feet, one arm raised defensively, the other tucked to his stomach.

“Sorry,” Tony said awkwardly. He gestured for the arm and stepped forward. “I can fix…” He trailed off as Fett jerked away, holding his left arm close.

Through gritted teeth, Fett asked, “Haven’t you done enough?”

Tony’s hand hung between them for a moment before Tony let it fall to his side. “Look, I messed up. I know I messed up, and I’m sorry. I-”

“This isn’t a game,” Fett bit out. “You lose, you die.”

“I’ve been in life-or-death situations before,” Tony replied testily.

“Solo thinks you are brilliant,” Fett said. "A fighter, a thinker. Someone who would bring change.”

Tony blinked, thrown off. “Thanks?”

“I don’t see it. You are careless, hypocritical, distracted. People die because of you. He said a warrior. I see a child,” Fett said scathingly.

Honestly… Tony had no reply for that. Fett braced his back against the wall, glaring at Tony until he looked away. Awkwardly examining a scorched wall, Tony watched from the corner of his eye as Fett rotated his arm, doing emergency relocation of his shoulder. There was a soft, nearly inaudible pop, and Fett strolled to the window. Not sure if the other man would appreciate his presence, Tony waited a second and cautiously approached, standing a safe distance away, but at an angle where he could see the siege on Paramexor’s fortress.

The wall surrounding the building had a sizable gap between itself and the rest of the city. What was once probably a secondary training ground was now a veritable battlefield, filled with the dead and the dying. The fighting had moved inside the walls by now, Iron Man and Iron Maiden with it.

“I’m going to go inside,” Tony said, waving vaguely in the direction of the walls as Fett ripped a shirt belonging to whoever lived in the room and began tying it up. “I suppose you’re going to stay here or head back to the ship?”

In response, Fett finished his makeshift sling and headed towards the door. Shrugging internally, Tony walked to it. As he walked past, Fett grabbed him with his right hand, pulling him close.

“I won’t die for you,” Fett hissed in his ear. “Tayli’bac?” he spat. He shoved Tony away with enough force - not to be mistaken for ‘Force’ - to send the stronger man back a step. Pivoting on his heel, Fett stalked down the stairs.

Tony stared after Fett, stunned. His first instinct was anger, but watching Fett stand at the edge of the door, shoulders taut as if expecting a hit and looking so very alone, Tony could not help but
feel a tinge of pity. It must be terrible, the inventor mused, to have no one worth dying for, because that meant that he had no one worth living for.

This man was who Tony might have been, in another life.

“T’d do it. For you. I’d take a blaster bolt to the… well, not chest. Maybe a shoulder or my foot. If you’re particularly nice that day, maybe even the stomach,” Tony said. Realizing how out of context it was, he added, “You’re important. Kinda. We bounty hunters should stick together.”

“Utreekov! You are foolish,” Fett scoffed. “You say you would do it, but when you stand in front of the army, you run.” He moved to leave the roof, but Tony blocked him. Paramexor was important, but, kriff, this had to be addressed now.

“I prefer the term ‘idealist,’” Tony shot back, standing in Fett’s way. “I don’t know who you’ve been hanging with, but there’s people who care about you. Kristoff, for example. I’d include myself on the list, but you make yourself very hard to like.”

“Slana’pir,” Fett ordered in a deadly voice. Tony hesitated, then stepped to the side.

“Look, if you don’t think that you mean something to me in a totally platonic way, then at least trust that I think you’re useful and need your skills and connections. I’m not throwing you away.”

“Your droid is escaping,” Fett said, looking at the clouds.

Tony walked to the door and looked up. He saw a hot pink dot in the sky, rapidly shrinking. He tapped his earpiece. “Tony to… Weekday-One. What the kriff do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m following Paramexor, boss. He’s up there, if you want to know;” FRIDAY said.

“And you didn’t feel the need to tell me?” Tony demanded.

“Just like you didn’t feel the need to replace me?” FRIDAY asked tearfully.

Deep breaths. Take deep breaths. “I didn’t replace you, Fr… Weekday-One,” Tony said with a calmness he did not feel. He eyed Fett for a moment, then walked away so the Mandalorian would not be able to listen in. “Friday, baby girl, that was you. That was your coding. I fixed the programs you asked me to. We ran into some problems, and we needed an AI on the ground. I would’ve taken you in a heartbeat, but I thought you’d be with Bail,” Tony said earnestly.

“I don’t want to talk about this.”

“It’s not like that. Friday…” He looked behind him to see what Fett was doing.

“I’m cutting the connection.”

“Friday!” There was no answer.

Tony put his hand on his face and dragged it down. Love and pining for Bail, sisterly jealousy for MONDAY, and all this passive-aggressive acting out? It was terrible. It sounded as if… as if FRIDAY had hit the infamous teenage phase. Tony imagined years of teenage angst as FRIDAY figured out who she was and what she wanted to do with her life. JARVIS was bad enough, with all the sad classical music and dim lighting. Tony hoped that FRIDAY did not go through all the health kicks that JARVIS went through, canceling all his fast food orders and bringing in salads and vegetable soups.
Fett had already gone into the fray, as far as Tony could see. There appeared to be a very violent man taking down slavers with one hand off to the right. It could have been any bounty hunter, but Tony was convinced it was Fett.

“Not going to deal with this. Nope.” It was probably cowardly, but Tony did not have time for this. Entering the gates, he edged along the wall until he was at a section with minimal scuffles. The bounty hunters and slavers at this part had both somehow managed to make the other side lose their blasters. They had all resorted to their fists, wrestling each other on the ground.

Hands stuffed in his pockets, Tony put on his best ‘I am not a target’ face on and meandered past them. Paramexor’s men saw him as a civilian seeking shelter, while the slavers… hopefully saw someone who was not quite as much a threat as bounty hunters. Whatever he looked like, it must have worked, because no one shot at him. He causally entered the main building before sprinting again.

Running through wrecked, deserted halls Tony looked for anything resembling a command room. He cut across a huge shipyard, noting the grounded spacecrafts. Then, someone tried to tackle him. The key word was ‘tried.’

“Hey, who are you?” the guy clinging to him yelled.

Tony looked down at the man hugging his waist. “I’m Tony Stark.”

No recognition.

“The guy who made your grapple?” Tony tried, seeing his invention on the guy’s belt.

“Hold on,” the bounty hunter said, letting go of Tony and straightening. He pulled out a StarkPhone and typed on it. He enlarged a picture of Tony and held it up to Tony’s face. “Oh, yeah. You’re him. Okay, go on.”

With a wary glance back at the obviously-insane bounty hunter, Tony took off again. He stopped, went back, and asked, “Hey, do you know where the command room is?”

-Insert Quote Here-

Sliding doors did not possess the same dramatics as slamming doors did, but Tony did his best, punching the wall as he entered to make that refreshing banging sound. “Okay, I’m angry. More than, angry, really. I’m furious, enraged. I’ve had death threats, had attempts on my life, went halfway around the known universe, and fought my way through a small army of incompetents. Where the fu- where the Force is Paramexor and how do I get him back?”

A mousy-looking woman pointed at the ceiling and squeaked, “He’s up there!”

“A good. Now open a line so I can call him.”

“Listen to him,” a man with a scarred face told them. “He’s Tony Stark.” No comprehension. “Leader of SI?” Eyes widened in recognition and went to StarkPads, earpieces, and objects latched onto belts. As one, Paramexor’s men pulled out their StarkPhones, found pictures of Tony, and compared it to the real-life version as Tony tapped his foot impatiently.

“We can’t,” a Rodian finally explained. “The KSC, they knocked down some of our receivers.”

“Receivers are easy. Don’t tell me you don’t know how to fix them.”
“We have a team on it,” he answered apologetically. “We couldn’t direct the space battle from here, so Paramexor flew up there to do it himself.”

“Weekday-One, is it possible for you to bring… Mark I into the space battle?” Tony asked, wondering if FRIDAY would understand that he meant Iron Man. He brought up a camera feed of the shipyard.

“Negative, Boss,” FRIDAY answered. “Mark II has shields necessary for successful space flight. Mark I has a 68% chance of destruction.”

Tony nodded, expecting this answer, though he was not happy about it. “Are all these ships broken?”

He was given a hesitant nod.

“Right-o. You, you, and you, get the wing off this starfighter,” he pointed at one of the fighters on the screen, “and switch in with this one. Get this hyperspace ring and weld it on. If you don’t know how to, get one of the technicians do it. Anyone have a spare StarkPad? Not going to lie, it’s probably not going to survive this plan.” He snapped his fingers twice. “Get moving!”

He snatched the StarkPad off of some poor bounty hunter’s hands. “I’ll reimburse you. MONDAY, copy all the information on this StarkPad. Any pictures, files, high scores in Master Builder, save them all and prepare to download on another pad.” Following the rest of his new minions to the chosen starcraft, he climbed into the cockpit, messily cutting open the console and fiddling with the wires in the control panel. He connected it to the StarkPad. “Sorry to whoever owns this baby.”

Some sparks flew at him, but they only stung a bit. It was a rushed job, but the StarkPad was now connected to the starfighter. “Monday, connect this to my personal pad, will you?” He pulled out the StarkPad that the beginnings of MONDAY were created on and checked once she signalled that she was done. Tony looked down the side of the jet to see the technicians finish welding the undamaged wing on. “We good to go?”

“Sir,” the lead technician said apologetically, “You should wait a bit. It’s unstable. The welds are still setting.”

“Your leader,” Tony said, not sure what Paramexor was to them, exactly, “is being captured by your enemies, and you’re worried about this?”

“Boss, what are you doing?”

“I’ll be fine, Fri. Kristoff, Suffee, you guys are in charge. Don’t disturb me,” Tony ordered.

“They’re done. All of the fights are winding down. They want to fly to Paramexor’s base…Dad? I can’t see you. Are you going to fly a starfighter up here?”

“I won’t be in danger,” Tony reassured her. “Concentrate on Paramexor. I’ll draw their attention.”

“I don’t like this. Tell me the plan!” FRIDAY insisted.

“Don’t really have one. I’m sort of winging it,” Tony said dismissively. He turned to some guys near the shuttles. “Can I hitch a ride out of the atmosphere? That wasn’t really a request, by the way.”
Just outside the atmosphere, close enough that gravity played tricks on the space shuttles and starfighters, numerous starcrafts were duking it out. Paramexor was anxious, though he did not show it. He could not - the moment he panicked, the pilots under his command would too.

“Delta Squadron, flank left,” he ordered. “Torrent Squadron, cover them, then veer right. The rest, follow me.”

This entire thing was a mistake. He was foolish to meet their challenge and face them in space. Now, the men on the ground would be pinned down in their fortress. His pilots, so brave and loyal, would all be killed. He himself would be taken as a prisoner, a slave, a mere token to keep his men in line. Paramexor would rather die.

The squadrons he called for answered affirmative, peeling off of the main fleet to complete their maneuvers. Safe in his cockpit, with no one to see him, Paramexor winced. He knew the outcome a moment before it happened.

As soon as the Torrent Squadron swerved right, the Delta Squadron was left wide open. One by one, the five unfortunate pilots in the Delta Squadron let out chilling cries that were quickly cut off. Paramexor could see the explosions at the corner of his eye.

Just as planned.

While the KSC starfighters were occupied slaughtering the Delta Squadron and keeping an eye on Paramexor’s main forces, the Torrent Squadron quickly made use of their distraction to carve a line of destruction through the middle of the enemy formation before Paramexor called the two survivors to retreat.

It was not enough. His men were dying.

“Left flank suffering heavy losses. Your orders?”

Paramexor clenched his fist. “Storm Squadron, diversionary maneuvers! Drop in fifteen seconds. Forrest, Gamma, and Steel Squadrons, fire at will when Storm Squad clears the danger zone.”

“Roger that!” his men snapped back.

Paramexor wondered at their loyalty, their belief that he would get them through this storm. Would they feel the same if they knew they were just pawns to him? That he sent the Delta Squadron out to die? That he did not expect the Storm Squadron to survive this plan?

It was for the greater good. The lives of many outweighed the lives of a few. Their sacrifice was necessary to win, or at least survive longer, Paramexor knew, but would they feel the same?

In the middle of defending against a pincer maneuver, Paramexor took a few seconds to watch silently as the last of the Storm Squadron died in a glorious red and orange fireball. One of his closest friends had been in the squadron, and Paramexor wondered if that was him.

For the Storm Squadron. Paramexor hit one of the critical areas on his next shot, sending the enemy starfighter swerving into its neighbor. Behind him, the Forrest, Gamma, and Steel Squadrons sent a volley of plasma to avenge their fellow pilots. Almost two dozen KSC starfighters were destroyed before the group scattered.

Somehow, it did not feel like a success.

A crackle had Paramexor turning his attention to one of his secondary channels. “Base? Are you
receiving?”

A muffled cheer went up over the open channel. “We are receiving, sir! The enemy is on retreat. It is safe to dock.”

Paramexor nodded. “Forrest Squadron, covering fire! Right flank, wait for an opening and retreat to the shuttles.”

A few starfighters immediately headed towards the shuttles, but most continued dodging and returning fire.

“Elson-”

“On it, sir!” the cheeky pilot answered without waiting for him to finish. One of the starfighters, painted an offensive orange, ducked out and began weaving between KSC starfighters. Taking advantage of the distraction, most of the right flank filed towards the shuttles.

“Sol squadron, retreat. Eclipse Squadron, cover the Sol Squadron.”

“Roger that,” answered the sole remaining pilot of the Sol Squadron. Half a minute later, there were no pilots in the Sol Squadron.

“Base, what is that obnoxiously-colored abomination?” Paramexor snapped, seeing a pink… thing fly past and engage half a dozen enemy ships. He was glad for the backup, but must it be that shade? It rivaled Elson’s ship in the art of being an eyesore.

“It appears to be an offshoot of the Red D- Iron Man, sir. We have information suggesting that it goes by the designation of ‘Iron Maiden.’”

Muttering under his breath, Paramexor directed his fleet, sneaking starfighters back to the shuttles and sending the shuttles down to the base once they were filled. Thirty more pilots… Twenty-nine more pilots… Twenty-seven more pilots.

Paramexor growled as two of the enemy starfighters swooped at him at the same time. He twisted his starfighter away, clipping his left wing on one of them.

His incredulousness only increased as they continued recklessly diving at him. “Those idiots are going to kill us both,” he muttered.

“Sir?”

“Not talking to you,” Paramexor answered.

“Dude, they’re herding you!” a new voice warned. With alarm, Paramexor realized that the voice was right. He was already cut off from the rest of the group, being pressed back towards a KSC freighter.

“Torrent Squadron is regrouping. We’ll be there in two minutes. Hold on, sir.”

“Steel Squadron redirecting from the shuttlers. ETA four minutes.”

“My squadron isn’t… isn’t available, but I’m still here,” that idiot Elson offered.

Paramexor felt his ship hum and slumped in resignation. “It’s no use, boys. Head back. I’m stuck in a tractor beam.” It was unsaid that their measly weapons were no use against a larger ship.
“Don’t worry, I got it covered,” the new voice reassured. “Can you see my starfighter? It’s the white one with one red wing and a hyperspace ring to your right. Can you see it? Hi, Paramexor!”

“Who are you?” Paramexor asked, getting the irrational urge to strangle whoever that annoyingly cheerful voice belonged to.

“That hurts. You don’t recognize my voice? That’s mean. Especially since my crew nearly died for you.”


“The name’s Stark. Tony Stark.” The starfighter dodged all that came near it, be it shots or other fighters. “Hold on, I got this. Ha!” The hyperspace ring lit up. Paramexor blinked and missed what was going on.

One second, he was still trapped in the tractor beam. The next, his starfighter was shooting off, and he was swerving to dodge one of the KSC starcrafts. He fought his way to a clear zone and glanced back.

Tony's strange starcraft was nowhere to be seen, having entered hyperspace. The freighter that had him was nearly cleaved in two.

One red wing floated away from the destruction.

-I could’ve ended here, but I didn’t. Aren’t I nice?- Tony pulled off his earpiece, rubbing his ear. It was kind of uncomfortable. He had to invest in better materials. He turned off the terminal and disconnected the StarkPad from it. He glanced to the next console over to see that Paramexor’s tracking signal was heading towards safety. Swiveling his chair around, he nodded to the silent group of bounty hunters who crammed into the room to watch him remotely pilot a stolen starfighter.

The bounty hunters stared at him. Tony stared back. None of them made a peep, so Tony supposed it was up to him to break the silence. “And that’s how you pull off a rescue mission,” he claimed, giving them his best showman smile.

Kristoff began clapping slowly, sarcastically. The rest of the bounty hunters did not pick up on his mood though. First, one of them joined in, then another. Suddenly, the whole room was clapping, whooping, and congratulating him.

Chapter End Notes

Y’know, it should be clear by now that I have no idea who the f… kriff, who the kriff 'Jango Fett' is. All I really know, based on my messed-up timeline, is that he was a slave roughly 2.5 years ago and that everyone around him dies. Except for his sister, who became a prisoner for years. That guy's more messed up than Tony.
Not my best but Whatevs.

Chapter Notes

So what is it I owe? Four consecutive weeks of updates? Five? I don't know any more. I'm sure most of you've noticed the last couple chapters haven't been up to scratch. Incoherent. Some are… downright depressing, actually.

I'm sorry. I had this chapter technically finished a month or two ago. Everything just… hurts inside - I guess that's how to describe it? Some days, I just want to scream and break things, but I don't, and some days I just want to sleep forever, but I can't. When I write, nothing goes well and bad things happen to the characters. I tried to delay, so that the story would be somewhat more positive when I write and edit it, but it seemed that it wasn't working and I'm running out of time, with Florence and everything, so I decided I might as well post it now.

I was going to explain everything that's happening in my life in this AN, but I chickened out. I'll explain next time, promise. It'll be next week, if I don't get hit too hard by Florence. Actually, from now on, I promise to have a max of four weeks without posting, barring major incidents. And if I don't post again after this chapter… I think it'll be reasonable to assume that Flo got me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As soon as Paramexor's heavily modified starfighter - something Tony would love to get his hands on - was safe inside the last transport shuttle down to the remnants of the base, someone broke out the alcohol. It was not the weak beer or fermented ale of canteens, no, it was good, hard smuggler's whiskey. As it became clear that the KSC were on the retreat, bounty hunters began pouring into their rather destroyed base to join in the cheer.

Not even Tony was able to resist joining in the good cheer, accepting a few shots as he made a long, meandering path through the increasingly boisterous crowd. He had to stop Kovlo from going overboard with a whole mug of the stuff. When he spotted Suffee, Tony sent Kristoff after the Rodian, unable to remember if Suffee had said he had a drinking problem or not. Just before Tony stepped out of the room, he hooked his finger under the collar of Gis's shirt and pulled him out with him.

"Gis, I probably have no right to rag out on you for this, seeing that I'm, well, me, but what do you think you're doing?" Tony tapped his foot and pointedly stared down at the glass of burnt umber liquid. Tony held out his hand until Gis reluctantly put the shot on it.

Gis scowled back up at him. "Gis - I - old enough to drink!"

"By the standards of the T'doshok, he is old enough to drink," FRIDAY acknowledged tightly before adding, "Then again, seeing that there is no minimum drinking age in Trandosha, that's not saying much."

The way the downturn of Gis's maw grew more pronounced told Tony that FRIDAY probably let him in on it. "By- Dangit, Gis. I want to help you. I don't want you to be like me when you grow up, I want you to be better! Just because- Oh, you know what? Kriff it," Tony said, seeing that he
was not getting through to the stubborn Trandoshan. Saurin. Whatever. "If you go to another planet, you have to follow that planet's rules. Denevar's legal drinking age is-"

"Seventeen," FRIDAY supplied sulkily.

"-seventeen. Are you seventeen?"

"Gis'tik is currently twelve standard years old," FRIDAY provided with a monotonous voice.

Tony paused, then looked to the nearest camera, trusting that FRIDAY was able to worm her way through whatever firewalls Paramexor's security division could devise. "Are you saying that we brought a kid that's not even in his teen years into a battlefield?" Tony asked, nearly spitting the words out in his haste. Force, the lizard was younger than Peter was during the 'Civil War' fiasco. Older than Harley was during the Extremis thing, but still!

FRIDAY sighed, a soft breath of air that sounded so clear that Tony could almost feel the brush of carbon dioxide molecules against his ear. "No. Trandoshans have shorter lifespans than most species. They cease to be children by eleven standard years. By fifteen standard years, they are considered full adults. Gis has been a 'teen' for the better part of two years."

Taking a good, long look at Gis as he put the shot on a nearby table, Tony asked, "Am I breaking any laws?"

Here FRIDAY paused. Tony could almost hear her processors whirling as she scanned through hundreds of laws and regulations. "On Denevar, you have violated several child endangerment laws. However, a case can be made on how you ordered him to stay on the ship. You had no knowledge that he was outside of the Black Fist during the battle."

"What?" Tony said almost gently, eyes staring daggers at Gis when he realized the Saurin had been out and about while there were murderous slavers roaming the small city.

"Meanwhile, you are skirting several education regulations. However, since you have only arrived recently, you cannot be held accountable for another six planetary rotations. On Coruscant-"

Realizing that laws on putting minors in dangerous situations were not his only worries had Tony cursing. "Kriffing-"

FRIDAY neatly cut him off by increasing her volume. "-you have violated three safety regulations, two health regulations, two traffic laws, a minor law on working conditions, a speeding law, and a parking regulation."

Tony pinched his nose. A parking regulation. He had crashed his ship saving hundreds of lives, and they stuck a parking ticket on him. That sounded on par for the course. Noticing FRIDAY's silence, Tony said, "No, no. Don't stop on my account. Please, keep telling me how many ways I can be charged and apprehended." He turned to see a large, bearded bounty hunter watching him. "Oi, you. Leave."

"The parking regulation and other related incidents has been pardoned by the Chancellor, while the civil suits have all been quietly paid for in full by one Prestor Organa."

Just one more thing he owed the Organas. He had saved them, but the costs were quickly adding up. Tony promised himself to keep a closer eye on the Organas, who had been watching over him and covering his back before he even thought to do so himself.

"Of Republic laws... As of today, you have broken a total of two hundred and eighty-two, seventy-
nine of which you are still currently breaking as of this moment. I don't think you want to know about the charges pinned on Iron Man."

Tony swiped the shot away from Gis's inching talons, wagging a finger at him. "Back to the ship. Can I trust you with that? Or do I have to follow you to make sure you get there safely?" Gis gave him a long look and stalked down the hall and through a missing chunk of wall despite the fact that there was an open door beside Tony. Tony was about to open his mouth and request FRIDAY check on him and make sure the lizard got back safe and sound, but FRIDAY spoke first.

"Boss, we need to talk. You replaced me." FRIDAY said quietly.

"Fri… it's not like that," Tony said tiredly. Deafening silence met him through the earpiece. "Fri, baby girl, you gotta understand. I thought it would be you. Different protocols, Republic coding, but still you. I thought that, once you got back from visiting Bail, you would… merge codes, become one whole. Fri..." Tony waited for her judgement. Would he be able to forgive himself if one spur-of-the-moment decision ruined all he worked for with FRIDAY?

Waiting for an answer was worse than the thrum of thrusters as Rhodey flew away from him in War Machine. Moments thudded away like the slow tap of Pepper's heels as she walked away from him for what Tony had been convinced at that moment was the last time. "I didn't visit Bail," FRIDAY said finally.

"What?" Tony asked, the tension bursting like a bubble.

A slender figure approached from down the hall and Tony stepped back against the wall to let the girl step past. "When I downloaded in the suit, I came here," FRIDAY admitted. "I wanted to see Bail, but you need me."

Tony was about to answer when the girl stopped in front of him, unnaturally still. "Hold up for a sec, Fri." She was pretty, Tony noticed in a detached way. Somewhere between late teens to mid-twenties. Age sort of blurred after a point. Black hair in a pixie cut that needed trimming and a shockingly pink pilot's helmet tucked under her arm, she somehow managed to look good in a matching pilot jumpsuit. "You're missing out on a good party. Whiskey's that way," Tony said, making a grand gesture to his right.

She tilted her head, just staring. Tony stopped and looked closer.

"Don't worry, I'm allowed to be here," Tony said, examining her. There was something familiar about her. Straight nose. Strong jawline. ...How did women always manage to have perfectly done makeup on?

Her blood-colored lips curled up. "...Boss?"

Tony started at the voice. "Friday?"

Those lips turned down and pouted mockingly. "No hug? Not even a hello? You're seeing your daughter for the first time, and all you do is stare."


The eyes fluttered shut, then opened. "Better?" Friday asked, amusement in her tone, though it did not show on her face.

"My daughter. Eyes up," Tony snapped, glaring at a passing bounty hunter that slowed down to
stare curiously at Friday. The man held his hands up in the universal sign of surrender as he walked away.

"You're going to be that parent?" Friday asked, tilting her head. Realizing that he had become somewhat of a helicopter parent, Tony snorted, a vague smile playing across his face. Friday observed, then copied it.

"Try Charell's smile," Tony suggested. "The one she uses after a successful bounty."

Friday paused, reviewing her recordings and multiple angles. Her small smile strengthened into a victorious smirk.

"My girl's going to be a real heartbreaker," Tony said proudly.

"Thanks, dad," Friday said softly, but where most women would look down at the praise or smile gently, Friday was unmovable as stone. A heartbreaker indeed. Tony could already see boys throwing themselves at her feet, only to be ruthlessly turned down without a second thought. "Dad, we have to talk about her. Wasn't I enough? What did I do wrong? Dad?" Her voice trembled, but tears did not form in her eyes and her face stayed firm.

"You didn't do anything wrong," Tony said firmly. He faltered after that. Heart-to-heart...er, code, just was not his forte. Children doubly so. Take Harley, for example. He handed a kid a weapon. He pinched his nose. "Just give her a chance, will you? I made U and 'Fingers, but that doesn't mean I love DUM-E any less."

Friday just looked at him, considering his words. Tony was pleased to note that the holoform kept blinking and 'breathing.' "Fine," Friday said stiffly.

Tony waited patiently.

"Now?" Friday asked when the moments stretched out.

"Now," Tony confirmed. "I think you'll like her. She's a bit... serious, but... just meet her, okay?" He smiled at Friday's hologram and leaned back against the wall, not letting his tenseness show. This was the moment that could make or break his family. Friday's hologram was unmovable as she connected with MONDAY. Tony could see the moment they finished - Friday focused back on him.

"She needs someone like a big sister to help her loosen up," Friday said decisively.

Tony's face broke into a smile. His little girls were getting along. "So, girls? My beautiful, smart, wonderful AI ladies? How do I not get arrested?"

FRIDAY gave MONDAY a few pointers as they ran through all the laws Tony had bent or outright broken. It turned out that Tony was breaking several health and work safety laws. His past ships had to be inspected. FRIDAY had started off well with the bounty hunting permits. Without them, Tony would no doubt be breaking laws in the lower thousands. Actually, they even got him out of fines created by property damage on his hunts.

There were only two things saving Tony by this point - the fact that it was apparently very hard to stick a crime on a single bounty hunter, and the fact that he was somewhat a very minor celebrity on Coruscant. Still, Tony felt bad about the property damage and put MONDAY to the task of recording them all. He would pay them back. One day.

FRIDAY and MONDAY promised to have things straightened out within a week. Tony hoped that
it meant they were just paying fines, not... changing the laws or anything. Or hacking and deleting the evidence, now that he thought about it.

Tony kept thoughts of AI overlords out of his mind, not because it he feared it, no. It was more because mind readers seemed to be everywhere, these days. Giving them a warning was a no-go. Tony would side with his girls, no matter what.

"Oh, and while you're at it, sign Gis up for school. Alderaanian."

-Insert Quote Here-

Even an hour after Tony finished hashing out petty details, the party was still going strong. Paramexor had been rushed off the shuttle and hustled into the med bay, though not before he gave Tony a Look, one that clearly said they would be talking. Tony did not mind - after all, he had his own bone to pick with Paramexor. Colton's bloody face was still vivid in Tony's mind.

Sure, there were minimal efforts to remove rubble. A few of the more serious bounty hunters continued to dig through collapsed buildings and the medical teams were still on duty. For the most part, though, Paramexor's men seemed to think that they were all done.

Tony sought out Fett the moment he could get clear of the celebration. He had FRIDAY track down the absent bounty hunter and intercepted him five blocks away from Paramexor's base, tracking down errant slavers.

Iron Maiden lifted a large, cracked section of wall off a bounty hunter as Tony walked past, blank eye slits following Tony's path. High in the air, Iron Man circled the air like a bird of prey. Some of the bounty hunters eyed it warily, but Tony could see clearly that it was MONDAY who was in charge of the armor, testing its capacities without the pressures of battle or with injured bounty hunters on the line.

He reached Fett just as the Mandalorian ferreted out one of the KCS panicked slaver burst out from a pile of rubble and made a break for it as Fett leaned down to peer at his hiding spot in suspicion. Seeing that the man was unarmed, Tony crouched down with his arms out, blocking the only way out of the ally.

The slaver feinted right, but Tony saw through the trick, tackling him unerringly. Pinning him down in a boxer's move that Happy had taught him what seemed like a lifetime ago, Tony withdrew his blaster and jammed it under the man's chin.

"Surrender or I'll shoot," Tony threatened. It was a bluff. He did not make a habit of killing unarmed men, but the slaver did not need to know that.

"I surrender!" the brown-haired nobody whimpered.

"Stay down. One wrong move and hot plasma will be eating through that empty skull of yours," Tony ordered. He got to his knees and stood up, one foot on the brunette slaver. Force, the man could not have been more than his early twenties. He looked roughly the same age as Colton, possibly even younger. "Got a pair of cuffs?" Tony asked Fett, making a decision.

"Going to turn him in to the authorities?" Fett asked, giving him an indecipherable look.

"Yep," Tony answered. He turned his eyes to the man in question, lifting his foot off. "Get up, hands behind your head. No cuffs, but you better not run. This blaster here can literally burn your legs off. Got a name, rookie?" Tony ordered firmly, listing off everything he could think of.
"I- Foyer," the brunette answered, eyes on the ground. "Sir," he added belatedly. Tony rolled his eyes.

"Look, rookie. I'm not going to lie. You screwed up, and you screwed up big. But here's the thing: your life isn't over. You can take this mistake and build yourself up better. You don't have to be a criminal. This is your chance to start over. We can help you. I promise," Tony said reassuringly, keeping an eye on Fett. Not all of his words were sorely for the slaver, after all.

From the corner of his eye, Tony saw Fett draw himself up. "Stark, may I see your blaster?" Fett asked politely, reaching a hand out. "Something's off with your aim."

Tony blinked, having not seen anything wrong with his aim. He had been designing guns and weapons of mass destruction for decades. He could say with absolute confidence that this blaster that he had created from scratch was like any of them - lethal and unerring. "Right," Tony said dubiously. "Thanks. Tweak it up with your Mandalorian secrets." He reluctantly handed it over, watching it like a hawk. "What's wrong with it?"

"For one thing, your safety's on," Fett said, flicking it off.

"Well, yeah," Tony said, looking at Fett like the man suggested 'bedazzling' it with rhinestones and glitter.

"Second of all, you were twenty degrees off. Shooting at this angle-" Fett pressed the blaster to Foyer's chin in demonstration. "-is much more efficient."

Tony eyed KSC's man, who had frozen in alarm and shot him a pleading look when Fett decided to use him as a model. "Fett, stop wasting time. I wasn't planning on killing him," Tony scolded, holding his hand out for the blaster. "Come on, I bet we can capture at least half a dozen more of these guys. Well, you can. I'll just head back with Joshua John Ward, here."

Fett looked at Tony in the eye. "Your third problem," Fett said, not moving an inch, "Is that you have to pick a path." His finger twitched onto the trigger. "And stick to it." He fired.

Looking back at it, hours later, Tony would say that the most disturbing thing about the whole event was that it was soundless. Like every weapon he made for his crew, Tony's blaster was silenced. There was a pleasant hum, a bright flash, and Foyer fell noiselessly, eyes barely beginning to widen in surprise.

"Work on your aim." Fett then tossed the blaster back to Tony and walked away, leaving the inventor with a cooling corpse. Tony stared at the dead slaver, then after Fett, stunned. He snapped out of it as Fett left the ally, disappearing from view.

That was not self-defense.

Murder.

It was cold-blooded murder.

With a last look to the corpse that had once been Foyer, Tony ran after Fett.

"What the fu- Force do you think you're doing?" Tony snarled, wanting to pin Fett to the wall to make a point. He restrained himself though. Part of it was because he knew he was already on thin ice with the Mandalorian. Most of it was because he was better than the Rogue Avengers. He could use words, not react with physical violence at the first 'difference of opinion.'
This was much more than a disagreement, though. Fett just killed someone. Foyer. Mid-twenties, brown hair, brown eyes.

"What did you think was going to happen? He'd follow you in, play nice, and by the end of the week he'd be broken out by his slaver friends," Fett said. Another person might have sneered those words, but Fett was calm. Clinical, even. "People don't change. They pretend, then they use you."

Fett abruptly fired into a window a building, causing another guy, presumably another one of KSC's lackeys, to fall out of a second-story window. He landed with a crack that had Tony wincing and loud screams, but Fett was on him in a second, with no regard to his injury.

Tony winced as Fett brutally twisted the guy's arm behind his back in a way that would have set off police brutality protests back on Earth. He immediately moved to intervene. "Fett… He already broke a leg. Don't you think that's a little harsh for-" Fett slammed his… well, Tony had no idea what it was… against the slaver's head to discourage him from struggling.

"No," Fett said shortly, making an aborted move towards his blaster.

Despite his unsaid threat, however, Fett did not actually withdraw his blaster. Realizing how much he was pushing the other man, Tony nodded. "Oh, okay. Yeah. Keep doing what you're doing."

Fett did so, smashing his elbow into the man's head to stop him from struggling. "They have a problem," Fett said, declining his head towards Paramexor's base. "I have a solution.

Tony felt the urge to chuck a brick at Fett's head. A brick for a brickhead. Or blockhead. Whatever the term was. He told himself it would not help the situation. "Your solution is killing everybody!"

"No, just the ones that deserve to be killed."

"And who gets to decide that? You?"

The two men observed each other, neither willing to budge. "Wanda Maximoff," Fett said abruptly.

Tony was taken aback. "Excuse me?"

"The witch. She joined HYDRA. She hurt people on purpose, killed them. She was wrong and deserved to be punished. You agreed. I agreed. They are no different. They joined KSC of their own free will. They deserved to be punished."

"I don't deny that she deserved some kind of punishment, but death? Really? How about a couple decades of imprisonment and and community service?"

"There are many planets that still accept the death penalty."

This was really not the direction Tony wanted the conversation to take. "Do you really think death is an acceptable punishment?" he asked instead of the 'you're insane' and 'I have the number of a great therapist' he wanted to say. "I mean," Tony continued, gentling his voice, "sometimes, I envy the dead. They get to rest. We have to struggle on." Honestly, Tony paraphrased it from some movie or show he watched, but Fett did not have to know that.

The slaver nodded, face pinched in pain. "I'm sorry, I-"

Something about Fett's face changed, hardened somewhat. "Quiet, you," Tony quickly ordered the slaver before turning back to Fett. "I know that look on your face," Tony declared, seeing that speech #1 was not working and quickly changing tactics and using another movie. "You lost
people. Maybe they died for you. Heck, maybe you think they died because of you."

Fett threw his hands up in disgust and stalked away, leaving Tony with the slaver. The slaver looked at Tony. Tony looked back at the slaver. "I didn't think that was going to work," Tony commented. He was glad it did. Speech #3 was actually from a musical, and even when he translated it to Basic, it still sort of rhymed.

The slaver nodded. "Thought fo' sure I'd get a blast to da' skull," he admitted.

Tony hummed thoughtfully, then signaled at the armors. Iron Man slowly flew down. The slaver's eyes bulged and he began yelling fearfully in a language Tony did not recognize. "Yeah, just put him in a brig, cell or something," Tony said. The armor nodded curtly and grabbed the guy, flying off. The guy was still screaming.

With a sigh, Tony followed after Fett, resigned to spending the next few hours making sure that the bounty hunter would not be killing anyone.

"Your morals have no place here," Fett said without looking at him.

"I'm too awesome to change. In fact, I find that a compelling argument on why this place has to change."

"Watch," Fett said blandly. "This world will tear your morals apart, and with it, you."

"That's not going to happen. The crew has my back," Tony said with a little smile. Really, if you ignore the wild crime rates, this place was an oversized Earth taking place over an entire galaxy.

"They'll die too."

Tony's smile dropped. "Excuse me?" Tony rounded out on the Mandalorian, angry that Fett implied that he would end up being the death of his crew. He had faced that kind of negativity with his old team, and this was not was he was going to deal with about his new team, in a new universe. "That misstep on the rooftop was an honest mistake, one that I'd like to make clear wouldn't be happening again. You haven't given me a chance. You've formed opinions about me and refused to change them despite all evidence otherwise."

He glared at Fett, but the younger man did not care to make a response.

"I've given you time. I've given you space. I didn't press when you made it clear you didn't want to talk. I kept a figurative open door for you and made sure you wouldn't be left out. I took every criticism and made myself better, but I won't do is let myself be put down again." Every sentence that came out of his mouth, Tony advanced a step, prodding the Mandalorian's chest. "If you didn't want to be part of the team - if you didn't want my kriffing friendship - Fine. I got the message. We'll get out of your hair. I won't ask you for help again."

Tony turned on his heel and stalked off, intent on bartering with Paramexor for a ship. He would beg Paramexor for a ship if he had to.

"Wait!" It was said with a tone of urgency. Tony stopped but did not turn around. Fett was silent, but the moment Tony was about to start walking again, the other bounty hunter muttered, "Sorry."

Tony made a strangling motion, clawed hands twisting to mime the action of wringing someone's neck. That one moment of loss of control over, Tony slowly pivoted to face Fett, who looked back apprehensively at his hands. Tony felt a twinge of satisfaction at seeing tinge of fear in Fett's eyes before the other man stamped it out, then instantly felt like a monster for feeling so.
"Y'know, you're sort of sending me mixed signals here. I think something's getting lost in the translation. Makes me sort of wonder if you're thinking about getting back-stabby here," Tony said, releasing some of the pent-up snark he had been keeping in.

Tony watched as Fett puffed up with anger and indignation, then slowly sunk down with a look of guilt and self-blame. "I-I have honor. I wouldn't do that." Fett frowned, seeming to mull over his words. "I wouldn't do that to you," he amended.

"But you can and will do that to other people," Tony said, stating the unspoken obvious.

Looking down, Fett pursed his lips. When Tony caught his eyes, Fett lifted his chin up. "It's not going to change. I'm not going to change."

"I can respect that," Tony said agreeably, "but I certainly hope that my crew was included when you said you weren't going to leave me hanging with the bill."

"It was implied," Fett said flatly.

Tony rolled his eyes. "Live a little. It was a joke. We good?" He raised his fist for a bump, belatedly wondering if Kristoff had taught Fett that bit of Earth customs or if they had some sort of Mandalorian equivalent.

Ever-present scowl on his face, Fett marched up to Tony. Without pause, the Mandalorian planted his foot flat on Tony's chest and used it to shove him backwards.

Tony was about to feel betrayed before a blaster bolt skimmed past his nose. "You could've just warned me!" Tony yelled as they took cover. Above them, Iron Maiden swooped down to assist in taking down KSC's newly-revealed pocket of resistance.

"Where's the fun in that?" Fett asked.

 Tony did not know how politicians and leaders managed it, but Paramexor looked completely put-together and dignified, despite the bandaged cut on his forehead and his arm in a sling. And glisten of sweat on his skin and the dust placed exactly right on his face, emphasizing his features… he was pretty sure the term was called 'heroically' scuffed or something.

The bounty hunter laced his fingers together and examined Tony, who struggled not to fidget. He had stared down countless board members before, but this was a whole different level. Tony was not going to start the conversation, but it seemed that Paramexor was equally reluctant.

To Tony's left, Suffee sat calm and poised. To his left, however, Tony could almost feel Kristoff's nervous tension as a physical force as the larger bounty hunter scuffed his foot on the expensive carpeting. Tony willed his third-in-command to be patient. The other two members of his crew present for the meeting, Galee and Friday, both chosen for their level-headed personalities, sat still and looking bored and unapproachable, though the latter received curious looks.

Having arrived moments before the meeting had started, Tony did not have time to reintroduce Friday to the crew. Actually, he had not recognized her himself, when he arrived. Friday had changed her avatar, this time to a tall, poised redhead with high cheekbones.

However, it was one of Paramexor's men that talked first. "So your… StarkPads," he said with distaste, "can remotely control starfighters?"
"Tiss'shar," FRIDAY whispered in his ear through the earpiece. Tony inclined his head a couple millimeters to let FRIDAY know he heard, eyes not leaving the Tiss'shar's.

"My StarkPads can. Your StarkPads can't," Tony clarified. He gave out good gadgets, but he kept the best for himself and his crew. Tony's eyes went to Paramexor. He was probably the only one that noticed the pinched look around Paramexor's eyes.

"What do you want for them? More money? We are your best customers!" continued the alien that reminded Tony of a velociraptor or some other bipedal dinosaur.

Suffee exchanged a look with Tony. "Surely you can understand keeping the best for ourselves," Suffee said reasonably. "It would hardly do for us to be attacked by our own inventions."

"We can work out a compromise, though," Friday added.

"And who are you?" the Tiss'shar asked, looking down his nose-snout thing down at Friday. Because Paramexor had a woman two seats to his left, Tony was inclined to think that it was not Friday's gender that was the problem, but her age.

Friday lifted up her chin. "I am Friday Stark, daughter of Anthony Stark," Friday proclaimed haughtily, playing arrogance and disdain. It was working - Tony could almost feel the Tiss'shar simmering in anger. His crew jolted slightly as Friday's words hit them, glancing at Tony before turning back to look at Friday's avatar with new eyes. Galee cast Friday an approving look.

"You don't look like him," the Tiss'shar said accusingly. Next to him, Paramexor looked like he very much regretted calling the meeting.

"I take after my mother," Friday replied icily. "She is a queen of her own making." Friday declared with pride.

"Kal-tan-shi," Paramexor finally spoke, "You of all people should know that age does not matter. Even children are every bit as capable as adults when it comes to killing."

The Tiss'shar scowled. He glanced from Suffee to Charell and Galee, his mouth curling up into a sneer as he looked back at Tony. Tony could see the hostile alien gearing up to say an insult of a more personal nature and was prepared to cut the negotiations short. His crew would not be enduring any insults.

"Kal-tan-shi, please," Paramexor said quietly.

The Tiss'shar glared at Tony but obligingly fell silent.

Tony inclined his head, then turned to stare at Paramexor. "Please explain to me why there was a trap laid out for me," he said casually. "And while you're at it, explain to me why my crew was put in danger." His voice rose in intensity. "Explain to me why one of my allies, one of my friends lost an eye."

Paramexor's eyes did an odd squint, gaining some wrinkles on the skin around it as he fought back a wince. "Please understand that it was not our intention..." He looked to Tony.

Tony looked stoically back, not giving an inch.

Paramexor sighed, like it was some large favor Tony was asking of him. "I used the gadgets I bought from you to began establishing my own house in the Bounty Hunter's Guild. Certain members of my house may have implied that we had SI backing."
"Certain members… or you?"

There was silence at the table.

"I see," Tony said quietly. "And why are they targeting me?"

With another large exhale, Paramexor glanced at on either side of himself. It must have been a signal, because as one, the odd grouping of bounty hunters on Paramexor's side of the table stood up and left, though not before casting Paramexor some concerned looks. Tony caught those briefs looks, the real concern that Paramexor's men held towards their leader.

"Go with them," Tony said, looking at his crew. The girls stood up immediately, but Kristoff lingered.

"You sure?"

"Yes," Tony answered.

Tony could see Paramexor examining his crew as they left, in a way reminiscent of how Tony himself had studied the reactions of Paramexor's advisors.

"Please, Mr. Stark, let us speak as businessmen," Paramexor said as the door closed behind the last man. "Risk... profit."

"From what I'm seeing, I'm risking my crew's life for a handful of credits." Tony said with a scowl. "You're hardly the biggest fish in the sea."

"You have something I would like, and I have something that you need," Paramexor said. "So logic dictates that we help each other reach our goals."

"I'm not seeing it. You need my gadgets. I don't need your money. There are plenty of other people willing to pay."

"And I think you are misunderstanding what I am offering," Paramexor said. "I have over three hundred bounty hunters on this base alone. The support personnel number eight hundred."

Honestly, that sounded like a threat to Tony.

"We could do more," Paramexor said. "We number almost two thousand. You and your Red Droid… your Iron Man… You fight for freedom. We are not adverse to that. After all, we have just fought slavers."

Then, Tony realized the boon he was offered. FRIDAY did too - she began spitting statistics and facts at him, almost too fast to comprehend. "Fifty percent. Give me half the power in your little organization and you'll have SI's support."

Paramexor looked pained. "You are asking for half of what I spent years building."

Tony listened to FRIDAY. "I get the situation," Tony said. "You're in over your head. You started a war you can't win. A little new guild of two thousand up against a regime that's been around since the Old Republic. You need my help, but I'm done creating things with no say on how they are being used. I think it's a fair deal. I get a say in what's happening, and you get SI's full support."

Because Tony saw it. Hundreds of bounty hunters, scattered throughout the galaxy, armed with SI products and ready to jump at his call. Many of the mid and upper-tier bounty hunters could
already go toe-toe with Jedi using whatever they had at hand. Fett himself was a prime example of this - rumor had it he killed six of them with his bare hands. Armed with SI tech or - Force forbid - Stark weapons, what could they accomplish?

Tony knew from experience that tech could make all the difference. He was living proof. Falcon. Ant Guy. Barton and the Widow, to a degree.

But if he made weapons, how could he keep them out of enemy hands? If he gave a, say, SI automatic blaster to a bounty hunter, but that bounty hunter was killed in a scuffle, what was to stop the other side from simply picking it up and turning it on other bounty hunters?

Tony's eyes fell on his StarkPad, the one displaying all of the camera feeds on the Black Fist. He looked and saw a little petri dish with filled with fungus.

"You have a deal," Paramexor said.

Chapter End Notes

Does anyone want to talk or something? You don't have to if you don't want to. I understand if no one comes, but I made a Discord account in a server for fanfiction writers and readers to have fun and interact. The invite link is https://discord.gg/c5KdwUf with no spaces

Did I miss anything? Oh yeah, I didn't write "Last of Her Kind" or whatever the title was, so no idea if it'll ever be updated or finished. Sorry if any of you were following that one.

I guess I can call this chapter a success. It's finally setting up for the story summary, at least. Meh. I probably tore up Fett's character, but seriously, that guy makes no sense. Read his Wiki. The guy's actions contradict themselves and his morals are all over the place. One moment, I'd be like, 'dude, now that's honor.' Then I'd be calling him a traitorous idiot the next paragraph.
Chapter Summary

Obligatory really-long author's note filled with excuses, then the story itself, which, surprisingly, isn't dark. Huh.

Chapter Notes

A lot of you have been really nice to me these last couple months, so I guess it's time to come clean. Hi, I go by Night. You can call me Lost, I guess - I've been getting used to being called that. My friend, Lost, and I started this account last year together. Well, Lost saw that I was struggling and made this account so I could have something going for me. We started OISAMOW's prologue together, but then I sort of… drifted away. I mean, I still contributed ideas, but I wasn't actively reading or writing it, more like bouncing ideas off of Lost and ranting about different points. I can say the words and talk about plot, but Lost was the one to type it up. Lost lured me back at… like, chapter 11 or something? Then sort of took a backseat and watched me go?

Well, Lost and I had a big fight a couple months back. I've been leaving things open, but Lost wouldn't come back. Last month we talked, and sort of agreed that we're not friends anymore, but not enemies. I was kind of hoping we could still colab on the story, sort of like how divorced parents have joint-custody of their kids, but that's not happening.

I'm not sure what Lost wrote for the first few chapters - I'm ashamed to say I've never had the interest to read it. Maybe one day, I'll go back, read it, and change chapters 2-10 to fit in more with what I have going on, but not now. It's kind of painful. Too raw, you see. But I promise that the story will go on. I'm in a better place than I was in when the story started. I might not have as much SW knowledge as Lost, but I /can/ say that I've watched four whole Marvel movies (All with Tony Stark in them!).

Oh and the reviews. And PMs. I'll get to them, I hope. I mean, I usually reply to each and every one of them, but since everything started, I've been losing track of them. If I don't reply to yours by next update… I probably replied to it in my head but forgot to write it down. Sorry. Those that I haven't replied to for months… Either Lost read them and didn't reply, or I lost track of which I did or didn't reply to, possibly both. Either way… Those aren't going to get replied to… ever.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The agreements were quickly hashed out, FRIDAY checking for loopholes and adding suggestions where she could.

Paramexor complained about the amount of work it would be to send all the data he had collected to Tony, expressing a sort of disbelief when Tony mentioned that he would have to go back to
Alderaan immediately after the meeting. Tony reassured him that thing would work out, but Paramexor remained unconvinced until Tony admitted he had a couple factories on Alderaan and needed to rework them to make gear for bounty hunters.

In the end, Paramexor would have full control over the bounty hunters until Tony's shipments began arriving. Meanwhile, Tony would be reading over Paramexor's data and how to run an organization. Tony neglected to tell Paramexor that he had been the head of a company with hundreds of thousands of people. No need to give the man insecurity issues.

Because that was the gist of it. Paramexor did not know who he was. He was not familiar with the raw destruction that was sitting across the table from him. Tony may have been known on earth as the Da Vinci of their time, but there was a reason one of his titles was the Merchant of Death.

Let Paramexor hold onto his misconceptions. As much as he appreciated the man, it would be Tony who would be calling the shots. Paramexor could hold the reins, the Pepper to his SI, but House Paramexor would know who was really leading them.

As much as he tried to hide it, something of his more vicious weapon-maker days must have slipped through, because Paramexor had a baffled air about him as they shook hands and left the room.

Right outside the door, there was something of a Mexican standoff, with Paramexor's men on one side, Tony's crew on the other, and Fett as his own team, looking darkly amused at the entire situation. Tony gave the expert bounty hunter an unamused look as he herded his crew away.

"He-he called you a-" Kristoff stuttered in anger, pointing at Kal-tan-shi or whatever-his-name-was as Suffee grasped his wrist and pulled him along.

"I'm probably calling him worse things inside my head," Tony said. "Chances are, I've probably been called worse things on my very own homeplanet. What can I say? I've had a wild past."

"He has," Friday agreed.

"And what's up with her?" Kristoff asked, jerking his arm away from Suffee, turning his finger on Friday, who poked it. Kristoff jolted back when he made contact with Friday, who grinned at him. He gave Friday an unimpressed look.

"Yeah, that's Friday," Tony said. "Not here," he snapped, noticing some bounty hunters in a loose knot around the corner. "Call everyone onto the ship. We're heading to Alderaan. Crew meeting on the bridge fifteen minutes after hyperspace."

"Everyone's already gathered. I said sorry to the government, paid the illegal entry fee, and signed off," Friday chimed in, looking pleased with herself. "We're going through the preflight check right now. We can leave right after you board the ship."

"Good job," Tony said, nodding to Friday.

"So that's really FRIDAY?" Kristoff asked.

-Insert a Freakin' Quote Already-

"Yes, that's really FRIDAY," Tony said, predicting Kristoff's question. Kristoff slowly closed his mouth and pulled his arm down. "It's hard-light technology. Might make some more for SI use, but not going to be mass-produced. Don't touch it. There's an electric current running through it."
Galee poked Friday again. "I can't believe you made solid holograms," she said eyes glittering. "Could you make something like that for me? Quick, inexpensive outfit changes, oh, that'd be a dream."

"You'd have to carry a five-by-five box around with you to emi the holoforms in the first place, so I don't think you'd be interested," Tony said. "Next off… House Paramexor. Half of it now belongs to me, for the low, low price of SI backing!"

He was met with silence.

"Okay, so, like, I get that you're not leaving us for a bigger, badder group of bounty hunters, so what the heck?" Galee asked.

"We're the better group," Kristoff said darkly.

"She didn't say that!" Greer said.

"Galee has merely professed that they are more numerically advanced and commit more crimes than us due to being active for longer," Kovlo cut in. Galee stuck her tongue at Kristoff. "Enough. If you provoke each other, I will put you both in time-out." As the two spluttered, Kovlo looked at Suffee, who gave him an awkward thumbs-up.

"Did I do the 'thumbs-up' correctly?" Suffee asked Tony.

"...Yeah." Tony said.

"Why do you want to be the co-leader, though?" Greer asked.

"Being the leader of an organization of that size… that would take up a lot of time. I'm not sure you can run that, SI, and still hunt with us," Suffee said reasonably. "Will you be taking an active role in running it, or will it be in name only?"

"Why in the galaxy would you make that deal?" Bai-Gon asked bluntly.

Quinton elbowed him. "Because what would be better than having an army under your control?" he joked.

"Because he is going to take over the Bounty Hunter's Guild," Fett said, speaking up for the first time. "They are the largest, semi-legal institution not under a government's thumb. They are quite possibly the only one at this time with a chance of standing against the Jedi."

There was an awkward pause as all eyes turned to Fett. Then, Suffee slowly turned to Tony to look him in the eyes.

"Hey, man, that was a joke,' Quinton said after a moment, breaking the silence. Almost immediately, everyone let their thoughts on that out.

"I get that you don't like Jedi, but really?" Bai-Gon said sceptically. "Quit it."

"What is wrong with you?"

"Guys, he just doesn't like Jedi, okay? Just let it go," Kristoff said awkwardly.

"Like they stand a chance. The Jedi are invincible," someone else scoffed.

Under the clamor, Suffee asked quietly, "You aren't planning that, are you? You can't."
Tony shook his head, eyes on the crew. He had not been expecting such defenses. "I'm not attacking the Jedi, I'm just limiting them." He considered the crew. "Do you guys know any Jedi?"

"We know of some Jedi. The Aleenas are apparently related to one or something. It's not surprising; they have big families."

Tony nodded thoughtfully.

FRIDAY made the alarms blare for one heart-stopping moment, making everyone panic and turn to the terminal, expecting some emergency. The alarms stopped a moment later. "Thank you for behaving in an orderly manner," Friday informed them primly.

"Right," Tony said. "Okay, we're not attacking the Jedi. Killing government agents… well, that's generally a bad thing, so we're not doing that. We're just setting up something different. The Jedi, they need some checks and balances. They can't just go into people's minds and make them do things. They need hard limits."

He noticed the Aleenas open their mouths to protest, angered looks on their faces and realized he could not just list their wrongdoings and expect everyone to agree. He needed to go the softer route, too.


Tony watched as they paused, thoughtful. The Aleena looked like they were reluctantly listening, but at least they were listening at all. Tony counted it as a win.

"Furthermore, why them? Forget all the rumors you know about them. Really, who are they? As far as I can tell, they're a religious institution, sort of a cult. Why should they be the ones who determine what's right and what's not? There's not enough of them for the power they supposedly hold."

"There's at least ten thousand of them. I think that's plenty," Kristoff said irritably.

"And how many millions of systems are there?" Friday asked icily. "Don't interrupt my father."

Tony inclined his head in thanks to Friday. "They received a tip-off about Mandalore, didn't have enough people to send someone in to investigate, and so sent off a unit to slaughter the wrong side. Everyone but one." He nodded to Fett.

Slowly, realization dawned on a few faces. "Sorry, Jango, I didn't know," Charell apologized.

"My condolences for your friends," Kolvo said.

"Sorry."

"I didn't know. I wouldn't have said that if I knew."

Fett sat, face unchanging like a stone, and it occurred to Tony that maybe the man did not want people to know.

"That's not the only time. Friday can list dozens of times in the last century where it was questionable if they were doing the right thing. A group of that amount of power should at least be well-informed. They should at least try to confirm rumors before they rush in, blasters blazing."
There. Enough to convince people that liked the Jedi that the institution was not in danger of attack, yet agreeable enough for the ones that disliked them.

Except for Fett, maybe. Then again, that guy was never happy, and he downright hated the Jedi.

"So, we good?" Without waiting for an answer, Tony barreled on. "Does anyone want to add something to the meeting?"

"Can you make me a suit like the Red… er, Iron Man?" Kristoff asked, eyes on Friday. Friday smiled in satisfaction as he corrected himself.

-Insert a Freakin' Quote Already-

Iron Man liberates Denevar

Breaking News: Iron Man Appears for Most Destructive Debut Yet!

IRON MAN ATTACKS DENEVAR

Iron Man Comes to the Defense of Paramexor

Paramexor Speaks - SI an Ally

30% off discount at Dex's Diner!

Stark and Iron Man - Any Connection?

Price drop on the latest comlink upgrades - Buy now!

Jedi Settles Dispute on Midrim Territory - Read Now!

-Insert a Freakin' Quote Already-

On the edge of a distant, rarely traveled asteroid field in a barren area of the galaxy, a ship called The Black Fist suddenly jumped out of hyperspace. An Iron Man suit and an Iron Maiden flew out, carrying unidentifiable parts before returning for more. As soon as the last items were settled safely on a large asteroid, the spaceship entered hyperspace. The entire process took less than one minute.

Iron Man held different pieces in place, as Iron Maiden's more dexterous digits fluttered over the screws and bolts and wielded whatever needed to be. Most of the pieces were already finished, though, and by the end of an hour, two drones stood at ready on the asteroid.

The first to move was the automated mining drone, cutting into the asteroid and processing the raw materials. Less than half an hour later, the second drone went active, taking the refined metal and began doing its job as an automated manufacturing drone.

Three hours later, there were two mining drones and two manufacturing drones. Six hours since the start, there were four of each. A whole day later saw two hundred and fifty six of them, all toiling away. And from there, the numbers exploded.

Iron Man brought herded more asteroids over and Iron Maiden began carting drones to nearby asteroid fields.

In forty-eight hours, there were over sixty-five thousand of the things. They hit a million before the day was out and surpassed it without fanfare. By seventy-two hours, there were four billion.
By this point, the two armors sent out a signal to all the manufacturing drones, which started crafting other materials. A few started making parts for transport crates. Some began crafting rough droids that used clumsy servos to put the crates together. Others began crafting parts for StarkPhones and StarkTerminals. A few, damaged by astroids that Iron Man and Iron Maiden were unable to protect them from, continued create mining droids.

By the time a train of shuttles came almost two weeks later, there would be enough cargo to make the pilots faint.

-Insert a Freakin' Quote Already-

They finally met in the empty rec room, by the portholes. Suffee was quiet as Tony approached, not looking away from the window. Tony waited, but Suffee seemed content to just watch the galaxy move.

"So what happens now?" Tony asked, breaking the silence.

Suffee stared at him with those large, bulbous eyes for a long moment before looking away. "Does it matter?" the Rodian asked bitterly, eyes fixed on the distant stars as they shot past, almost too quick to see. "No matter what I say, no matter what I tell you… it's not going to convince you. You're not going to stop."

Tony opened his mouth, but then their eyes met in the reflection of the glass.

For a moment, Tony saw an odd imposition of two redheads he knew - Pepper and her need to protect, the disapproval of Iron Man, along with Natasha and her insistence of bending under pressure because 'they weren't going to stop.' It was an odd mixture of standing firm, yet giving in.

"Yeah," Tony admitted after a long moment, "I'm not going to stop."

"I won't stand in your way, but don't expect me to agree." Suffee turned from him and walked away.

Tony took two steps after the Rodian, then stopped, deciding to give his second-in-command a break. Instead, he went to the workshop, passing through several open doors. He passed the rec room, where Gis and Kristoff were huddled, snickering over something that they immediately hid.

A few doors later, he heard the females of the ship in Galee's commandeered room through the open door.

"I have also added… automatic physical responses to emotional stimuli," Friday admitted.

"Like?"

"Once certain thresholds are reached or overcome, human reactions will be followed. The end results included for certain operational parameters include blushing, shedding tears, or frowning." He finally reached the doorway and walked pass, Friday seamlessly raising a hand in greeting the split second he appeared in eyesight before disappearing.

Tony paused and walked back to make sure he was not seeing things due to his old age. Nope, his eyes did not deceive him. Friday did have purple hair and a mini dress that was styled like a galaxy. And there were definitely star stickers on her shoulder.

"Hi!" Galee said cheerfully as she tried to make yet another sticker adhere to the hard-light. Tony was convinced that it would not work, and tried to figure out how Galee managed to get the ones
on Friday's shoulders to stay.

"They're not sticking, just balanced," Friday explained, shrugging her shoulder. True to her word, the stickers fluttered down the moment her shoulder tilted.

"I can fix that," Tony offered.

"Can you fix the fact that I lose motor control for three-fifths of a second whenever someone touches the holoform?" Friday asked.

"Or the fact that if something touches the holoform for more than five minutes, it burns?" Charell held up a blanket, disgruntled.

"Come down to the lab in half an hour and I'll look into it," Tony said, wondering how they managed to do that.

Heading down the stairs to the bottom floor of the ship, Tony wondered about the viability of making stairs that could turn into slides for amusement, if nothing else. From there, it traveled to starships. Starships were expensive, yet they were going through them at an alarming rate. In fact, if Tony had not contacted Prestor, he was sure that the crew of *The Black Fist* would have been arrested the moment they landed on Alderaan - the ship was listed as a pirate ship and were wanted.

Tony could not expect Fett to show up right on time with a trusty ship or for a very convenient pirate ship to appear whenever he needed one to. Plus, the ships were surprisingly *delicate* for something capable of space flight. And the prices of fuel? That was almost a *crime*.

But what about *StarkShips*? Shielded spacecrafts that could stand more than two direct hits, powered by the arc reactor - no fueling necessary. To protect the reactors, he did not have to sell them, just lease.

Tony recorded a transmission for Prestor. "Hey, Prestor? I just wanted to let you know that I'm going into the starship business. Tell anyone owning a starship to sell all stocks and go look into agriculture or something. I'm going to be revolutionizing space travel."

He sent it and started a timer. Three minutes later, the terminal dinged.

-Insert a Freakin' Quote Already-

His StarkPhone dinged, a sound that was quickly becoming commonplace in the Organa's palace.

In a well-practiced move, Bail reached into the pocket of his robe and pulled out his Starkphone, not stopping his rapid scroll down a datapad or slowing his walk. Finishing the chapter, Bail switched his gaze to the phone

-TS-

#PersonFound #Stark'sDaughter

@BailOrgana Look outside.

-HisGirlFRIDAY

-TS-

Bail stopped, frown on his face. He glanced outside through the long hall of arches, seeing a
starship lowering down on their private shipyard. Wondering what it was about, he checked all of his notifications on 'Stark' and 'Friday.' There was nothing he had not seen yet, just the 'Iron' robots - if they were iron, he would kiss a Twi'lek - photos of Denevar, and Stark's latest ship, the latest StarkPhone commercial…

Hold on…

Bail flipped back to the latest starship that Tony Stark had commandeered, holding it up to the starship that was just settling down. It looked like the exact same one, but that did not mean anything - starships were mass-produced.

Still, his heart was beating faster and his mouth was drying up. "Can you handle it on your own?" he blurted out impulsively.

"What?" the advisor asked, surprised.

"The finance meeting, can you handle it alone? Just this once? I… Something came up."

"Do you know how-" The advisor stopped, looking at Bail's face, then to the window. He began smirking. "Of course, sir. Have fun." He winked and pulled out his own StarkPhone as he walked away, no doubt sending the newest gossip down the secret group chat that the Organas just knew their staff had.

Bail could not find it in himself to care. Checking to see that no one else was in the hall, he did something he had not done in years. He hopped into the railing and grabbed the branch of the trusty chinor tree that he used in his childhood years to escape his father's army of tutors. He tested the branch, but it stood firm.

One last glance to make sure the coast was clear, and Bail swung himself onto the branch and climbed down before racing through the gardens towards the shipyard. He checked his robes and saw that there were leaves and a smudge of dirt. Hopefully no one would notice.

He reached the shipyard, only to see his father and his father's head advisor already there. The head advisor that happened to be the one who taught him how to manage finances. He also happened to be the one that suggested Bail head a finance meeting for experience.

Whoops.

Bail gave them a sheepish look. The advisor glared, but Prestor only looked amused, holding out his hand expectantly. The advisor reluctantly handed some credits over.

"Is it them?" Bail asked his father, resolutely ignoring the fact that his father and his teacher were betting on him. Is it her?

"You have to be more specific than that," the head advisor said snidely, still smarting over the lost credits.

"Friday, is she here?" Bail asked, unable to keep his excitement in.

Prestor sighed. "Yes, the Starks have arrived and will most definitely not be causing an economic upheaval in seven days." He handed a few credits back to the advisor.

Bail stared. "Economic upheaval?" He fidgeted. "Should I… be in the meeting?" he asked reluctantly. As much as he wanted to be there when - if - Friday walked off the ship, the planet was more important.
To Bail's relief, Prestor shook his head. "The meet is not due to start until Mr. Stark arrives to the room."

"He is the one who is causing the meeting," the advisor added.

"I'm the one causing Alderaan to land on top of the upheaval."

Bail spun around to see Tony Stark behind him. A Rodian was leading a Trandoshan away and two humans who had to be related were moving crates down. Bail eagerly looked around for a girl his age or the flying orb. To his disappointment, neither were there.

He gave a short bow to the inventor. "Excuse my attire. I will be at the meeting shortly," he said.

He was waved off. "No need," Tony replied. "You'd be otherwise occupied."

"Bail."

Hearing his name from Friday's familiar voice, Bail stopped and turned with a smile, expecting to greet Friday's orb. The words died on his lips as he saw the approaching goddess. Scarlett hair carelessly swept over her left shoulder, fading to gold. Tanned skin that almost glowed. Dark eyes blinking up at him, framed by long lashes. Bail was struck speechless.

But it was Friday. It could not possibly be anyone else but Tony's daughter. He could see the mischievous inventor in the shape of her eyes and the curve of her jaw, the impertinent way she met his gaze squarely, unafraid of tradition and rank and unbound by Alderaanian traditions.

She was a blaze of color, colors that signified... Well, Bail was not sure exactly what, but he knew it was probably bad, judging by the way the head advisor stiffened beside him. Or maybe the stuffy old man was offended by how much skin she was showing, a lot more than the average Alderaanian.

"Friday," Bail breathed. He held his hand out. Blinking, Friday took a moment too long to reach out, but Tony understood - Friday was doing a quick research of Alderaanian traditions to determine actions and intent.

"Cloaking technology?" Prestor whispered to Tony unsurprisingly, eyes on Friday. He had just witnessed a crate suddenly disappear, a girl standing in its place.

"Nothing as fancy as that," Tony muttered approvingly.

"Operational parameters" that Friday had talked about must have been reached, because a light blush appeared on her holoform's cheeks. "I... thank you," Friday said. She looked at their joined
hands, then at Bail.

She loosened the grip, sliding her hand out, to Bail's confusion. He opened his mouth to ask, but was silenced when Friday threw her arms around him in a hug. "Date me," she demanded in a typical Stark fashion. Tony nodded approvingly.

"Um, I…" Bail stammered, reddening. He knew that the sword was an expensive gift, one that nobles and royalty gave as a courting gift in years past, but he had always imagined asking a girl in the middle of the Organa's gardens, surrounded by bubbling brooks and sweet-scented flowers. But Friday was not the typical noble lady. "Uh…"

He caught Tony Stark giving him an evil look. Beside him, his father was glaring at him, because nobles did not splutter.

Bail cleared his throat. "Miss Friday Stark, it would be a honor if you would let, er… allow me to court you?" he said, feeling as if the carpet had been swept out from under him.

It was not a feeling he had ever had before. Bail was an only child. He had no older brother to jibe with or a younger sibling who played pranks on him. Most of his life had been spent studying to step up his father's place. The commoners' children were too intimidated to treat him like one of them, and the other noble children simply did not participate in just undignified behavior.

He was caught off-guard, surprised in a way he had never been before. He somehow knew that being with Friday would only make it a common feeling.

He found that he was looking forward to it.

-Lost had this in the scenes she didn't use, so I figured I'd add it-

The teacher read the note the headmistress had sent. She checked her makeup - done in the latest Alderaanian fashion - one last time before standing up in front of the class. "Well, class, we have a new friend coming in," she chirped to her group of elementary students. "Do any of you know who Tony Stark is?"

At least half the class raised their hands, but Jael answered first. "He saved the Viceroy!" she announced proudly.

"Remember, you have to wait to be called on before speaking!" Miss Tamaka scolded the troublemaker. Jael pouted and the class giggled. Miss Tamaka clapped her hands twice to gain control over the rowdy youngsters. "His son will be here any minute, and I know you all will be nice to your new friend!"

She smiled as her little flock of schoolchildren nodded eagerly, breaking into excited whispers. It would be such an honor to be teaching a young Stark. Hopefully, he would be just as brilliant as his father. Miss Tamaka could already imagine bragging about it to her coworkers at lunchtime. They would be so jealous!

But… not as jealous as when she would be scheduling a parent-teacher meeting with the Tony Stark himself! There was no sign of a Mrs. Stark - rumor had it that he was still single and up for grabs.

They heard a knock on the door.

Sugar-sweet smile on her face, Miss Tamaka fluttered to the door and opened it, stepping back to let the ticket to her new future in. She was expecting a short boy with a charming grin, brown hair,
and warm eyes.

Instead, in stepped a giant alien of some lizard species, almost a head taller than her, with vicious claws and sharp teeth.

"Oh dear," Miss Tamaka whimpered.

"Whoa," Jael said. It would be that last thing Miss Tamaka remembered before she kneeled over in a dead faint. Gis did not bother trying to catch her, merely watching morbidly as she slid down onto the floor. The children offered no help either, just chattering about their newest member with glee.

Gis snorted, looking down at the prone form of the teacher. "Class over," he grunted out. With that, he turned around and stomped down the hall.

"Wait up!"

"Can I see your claws?"

"Roar! Please, do a roar!"

"Whoa," Jael repeated as the group of schoolchildren all clambered out of their seats to follow the reptilian out of the classroom.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took so long. Ugh. Lost makes typing look easy. It's not. It's really not. Hope that you can't tell which chapters I wrote. I've been forging Lost's writings for forever, so I think we share a similar enough style. Tell me if you spot anything that shouldn't be there. Like, I spelled 'PrestAr' at least two times.

Well. Life goes on. I've handled the chapters pretty well, I think.
Story Discontinued. Sorry.

Chapter Notes

Hello guys. I’m sorry.

I know that it's coming for a long time, now, but it's here. I can't do this anymore, and I can't do this to you guys anymore. I can't. I can't and I'm sorry.

I really am. I know I’ve made lots of promises and broken them too, and all I can do is apologize for that. Life’s gotten a bit crazy, and I just can’t write this anymore. I’d like to apologize to you all.

So, yeah. This story is going on hiatus. It's discontinued.

Why?

Well, it’s a mixture of reasons, really. Life’s bleak. I’m really sad. I’ve hit a giant writer’s block. Filler blurb. You know, the bane of all writers?

But most of all…

SOME OF YOU’VE BEEN REALLY, REALLY MEAN TO ME! Okay, I know that sounds kind of babyish, but it’s true! Some people - guests and non-guests - have been sending some nasty comments and I can’t take it anymore. A useless bunch of words. My ego is too fragile to deal with all this.

You guys have been sending me on a spiral to a dark, black void. Collection of letters in a jumble. “Depression,” I believe the word is called. Placeholder sentence over here. I apologize.

If anyone wants to adopt this story, shoot me a PM so I can go over the details and stuff. Some filler right here. I'll hand over my notes so you can finish off this story in a way both of us can be proud of. A useless sentence to take up space and make it look like I’m typing serious stuff.

Readers, I'm glad you're back in this little tab-page thing. I don't like the idea of you guys rattling around a dark room by yourself on a computer. We all need friends. This fanfiction site is yours, maybe more so than mine. I've been surfing this site since I was twelve.

I never really fit in anywhere, even in school. My faith's in online people, I guess. Readers. And I'm happy to say that, for the most part, they usually don’t let me down too often. Which is why I can't let them down either. Passwords can be changed, but maybe they shouldn't.

I know I annoyed you, Readers. I guess I thought by not telling you about my personal problems, I was sparing you guys, but I can see now that I was really sparing myself, and I'm sorry. Hopefully one day you can understand. I wish we agreed on my updating schedule, I really do. I know you're reading what you believe in, and that's all any of us can do. That's all any of us should.

I’m sorry. Some more meaningless sentences. A platitude or two.
...Right.

Happy belated April Fools, guys!

I’m sure some of you remember the MLP prank of last year. Okay, okay, this one is a bit meaner. I’m a bit meaner. I’m grittier and stronger now. I don’t think that this’ll fool a lot of people, since I’ve repeatedly said I’d never abandon this story, but you never know! Honestly, I think this prank would work better on FF. Sorry for the big, meaningless piles of text above. I had to write a lot and take up space so it looks like a really large AN and no one could see that I have a story posted.

274 Bookmarks and 412 Subscriptions right now. Let’s see if I fool anyone so hard that they unbookmark me!

Anyways...

Hola, amigos! I’m alive, yeah! So… If you read my Author Bio or whatever it’s called, you’d know that I went on meds for a while. Meds that took away the little inner voice that give me wild ideas. Ideas like an Avengers-Star Wars fusion story.

Anyways, I’m in a better place… Not ‘in a Better Place’ as in death, just a better situational and mental place. So now… less-ish/different-ish drugs. I mean, meds. Yep, That was definitely what I was trying to say. I’m on less meds and that inner voice that whispers stuff to type up is back!

While ‘under the influence’ of… meds… I got thinking about what y’all said about friendship and Lost, so we met up again and made up. It was all good, then… well, guess what happened. Guess. What. Happened.

Lost asked me out. Yep, he asked me out. He asked ME out. HE ASKED ME OUT!!!

This gal is off the market, dudes. I have a cruuuuush. I am in looooo~ Uh, no. Nope. Too early to say the L-word. Still, my heart bouncing and singing, and… Man, I bet this is how being on drugs-drugs (as opposed to meds-drugs) feels like, ya?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It starts small.

A crate of gadgets from some unknown business, headed to some even lesser-known planet on the Outer Rim. A few small packages sent here or there. A few square feet on a freighter chartered by an unknown to transport who-knows-what.

It starts with a meager amount that had most major shipping corporations turning their noses up, refusing to consider the pittance transporting it would bring in favor of transporting items in bulk, and larger gadget companies snorting at the presumptuous upstart that dared squeak a challenge at them.

It grows slowly, much too slowly to be noticed.

Maybe a few of the tech companies noticed a slight dip in their profits, but those were easily waved off. Less datapads being bought? Just a phase, brought on by the recent business booms. Oh, the bounty hunters are buying less armor? Well, those fools get themselves into trouble daily. Trust
them to kill themselves off and deny us profits!

Well, maybe not in so many words, but that was the general gist of it.

Meanwhile, Tony kept note of which companies were particularly friendly to him, and which simply… weren’t. For no reason at all. Nope, definitely nothing sinister.

The thing about the entire affair was that it was silent. Sure, the general population saw a small increase in Stark products, but besides the occasional mention of a new product that hit the markets, there was no Holonet coverage on the new rising star.

For this, Tony was grateful. No need to make enemies this early on in the process. In this galaxy, it would be so easy to make a person disappear, to squash a fledgling company before it started to soar. He wanted all the foundations just right before he shook things up. It would do him no good if the resulting avalanche buried SI with it.

*Just a Plain Line Break, Actually*

The SI headquarters was in the middle of what Prestor liked to think of as ‘Organa Territory.’ He’d never say the words aloud, but that was exactly what it was. For centuries bordering millenia, the area had been home to the Organas’ staunchest allies. The fact that the Organas’ palace was located in the heart of the area certainly did help.

As he walked through, he received nods and bows of respect, though few people approached. A bond with the people they spoke for was an important part of ruling. As such, Prestor made sure that he and Bail often walked among their people. Still, Prestor made a signal of later. There would be time afterwards, but he needed to be somewhere presently. The people nodded and stepped back, trusting in his promise to talk later and allowing him through.

Prestor walked into the SI building confidently. He recognized the young man behind the desk.

The door slid open silently, and Prestor took a step in.

It took all his hard-learned political skill to prevent himself from overtly gaping at the room.

Sleek tables lined the walls. Machines stood in the open, parts gliding together with a soft hum to put together… something. Holograms of all different colors danced through the air, displaying statistics, blueprints, and even holonews. Prestor had never seen anything like it.

Due to the cost and the mere complexity of programming what you wanted into a three-dimensional shape, most places merely had two-dimensional holograms or simply used expanded datapads. Stark did not have that limitation. Just about every hologram in the room had a hidden depth to it, even for the two-dimensional graphs and statistics.

The man himself was in the middle of the fray, standing over several dismantled starship engines and making notes on different holograms. Prestor was greeted with a nod and a “I figured that it’d be less expensive to have my own starship company instead of buying or hiring new ones every time something happens.”

“Good afternoon,” Prestor said, undeterred.

“StarkPads will be officially launching in less than twenty-four hours. Want one? It’s like StarkPhones, only bigger. Wait, hold on… Didn’t I send you about a hundred of them a couple months ago? Nevermind, then,” Tony chattered on absently as he disconnected another part. “Wait, what were we talking about? Starships. Right.”
“My day was great, thank you,” Prestor said dryly.

“I’m thinking of an SI transport company. Hyperfuel is expensive, but I’ve got an alternative. Arc, maybe. Might have to switch them out after every trip. Gotta test that out.”

Prestor had no idea what Tony was trying to say, but he was getting annoyed. “Your building looks fantastic.”

“If it works, we can provide the same service for half the price. Or something. Profit margins...”

“I hear you are marrying a Hutt. My congratulations. It is to my understanding that she is particularly large and sludgy,” Prestor said randomly as Tony added something to one of his holograms. There was no reaction to his sentence.

“I’m also thinking about renting the arc reactor out. It would revolutionize the industry. Gotta make sure that no one can use it for evil, though. Friday gave me a history lesson. Don’t need any more evil overlords building weapons of doom. Both I and the Republic have enough of that, don’t you think?” Tony turned a hologram around to modify something on the side, and Prestor realized what it was. It was an engine of some sort, sleek with glowing, blue lines that seemed to be more for aesthetic purposes than function.

With some effort, Prestor tore his eyes away and said, “Pink is now the official color of Alderaan. All sentient beings must wear an article of that color. Seeing that you are not, I was sent here to arrest you.” He looked at the engine and wondered if Tony would notice if he moved it off the table. From what he saw, he doubted it.

Tony was in a zone, though. Prestor recognized it. It was the look his daughter had when she was in the middle of playing a piece of music she’d practice a hundred times over, the look runners had after their exhaustion inexplicably fell away, leaving the light on their feet and feeling as if they could run another dozen miles.

“Speaking of imminent doom, what do you think of restoration projects? I don’t think most of Coruscant has ever seen a plant that wasn’t cooked and on a plate. Or should I start off with somewhere else? Nar Shaada looks like it needs a Stark, but I’m not sure I want to be there.”

Tony seemed rather talkative, more at ease than Prestor had ever seen him. The politician wondered whether it was because Prestor was meeting him in his territory for the first time, or because the inventor was distracted. “My son kissed your daughter an hour ago. It was a first kiss for both of them,” Prestor said, instead of asking. “Very sweet and romantic.”

The genius’s movements slowed and halted. “Wait, what?” Tony said, looking flabbergasted. He pointed at Prestor. “You liar!”

“I am a politician.” Prestor raised an eyebrow. “Of all the things I said, that was what you found shocking?”

“Holocaptures or it didn’t happen.”

“It didn’t happen,” Prestor said simply.

“Oh,” Tony said, looking put off. “Okay. So why are you here? Welcome to my lab. This is where science happens.”

“A bit late, but thank you,” Prestor replied. With another glance at the hologram, Prestor asked, “For future reference, do you prefer me to lead with pleasantries and meaningless smalltalk, or
would you like me to get to the point?”

Some cultures saw the banter as wasting time, deceptive, or even offensive, and while Tony had made no indication he thought the same, Prestor wanted to know that he was not annoying the inventor. Tony was more dangerous than Prestor initially realized, and being an ally was so much better than being an annoyance.

“Wow, to the point. Never had a politician do that.”

“I aim to shock and inspire,” Prestor said.

“I don’t mind a bit of interesting conversation, but the moment you start talking about the weather, I’m out of here,” Tony said with a grin.

Prestor wondered at the oddity of a man. What was the point of talking about the weather? The workshop had plenty of windows, and there was a display on the far corner of the room, showing current temperatures, wind speed, stock prices, crime level and traffic of multiple planets, Alderaan included. “Noted,” he said.

“So why did you come here? Did you get my deliveries?” the eccentric inventor asked.

Prestor remembered the mysterious chunk of credits that appeared in the Organa’s bank account that Tony insisted that SI had nothing to do with and the boxes of StarkPads, headsets, terminals, listening devices and spyware that had arrived at the palace’s many doorsteps. “Why would we ever need… ‘tasers?’” the viceroy asked. It was small and slightly barbaric.

“It’s in case you need a quick but harmless way out. I mean, blasters are obvious. You’d go for anything shaped like a blaster in the middle of a fight. No one expects the stick about the size of your pinky to be the thing that takes you down,” Tony said with a grin.

Prestor eyed the inventor. It was as if he expected a battle or protests, at least, to occur on Alderaan. The very thought that was ridiculous. Alderaan was peaceful and cultured. Things like that… simply did not happen. “Your home planet must have been very… eventful,” Prestor commented, not hiding the judgement in his tone. Tony was a very forthcoming person and Prestor trusted that they knew each other enough not to take it personally.

“Very eventful,” Tony agreed, spinning another hologram around. “We had several conflicts going on, last I checked. I mean, I left right in the middle of a war.” He looked up at Prestor with worry. “Don’t worry, I’m not about to bring a war to Alderaan. Despite the things I get involved in, I’m very much against innocents dying.”

“I hold you to that,” Prestor said. As much of a debt he owed the Starks, his people came first.

There was a couple minutes of silence, where Prestor watched as a holographic space shuttle slowly formed, a thing of sleek curves and dangerous angles, intimidation and beauty in one.

“Let me be frank with you,” Prestor said, fixing his gaze on the inventor. “You never clarified what the Iron Man was to you. At first, I believed you created it and sold it to a friend or another contact of yours, but now I’m having second thoughts. My informants have retrieved unedited footage from Denevar. It does not move like how a droid should.”

“Because it’s not a droid,” Tony said, giving him a hard look. Figure it out, because I won’t tell you.

Prestor looked back at the inventor for long moment. He had suspected as much. Now the question
was who was inside the armor. It seemed of Mandalorian make, but there were witnesses who swore they saw the Mandalorian, Jango Fett, with Tony while the armor was in the air. It could not be either of them.

He did not need to know the specifics, though. Plausible deniability. Knowing that Tony was connected to the armor was enough for now. He gave a small nod.

“Will the Jedi be involved?” Prestor asked. “House Organa has always stood behind the Jedi.” He met Tony’s gaze seriously. *If you come into conflict with them, I won’t be standing for you. I can’t.*

Tony eyed him with a look of mild surprise, though the direct reason *why*, Prestor could not puzzle out. “Warning received,” Tony acknowledged with a nod. “No promises, but as of now, I have no concrete plans about the Jedi, other than replicating a lightsaber.” *There will be plans involving the Jedi in the future.*

Prestor took the conversation change. “Lightsabers are the weapons of the Jedi. I doubt you will have much success with that.”

Tony grinned, looking thrilled at a subject he enjoyed. “Is that a challenge? That sounds like a challenge. Challenge accepted!”

Hundreds have tried. Prestor could’ve told Tony that it was pointless to attempt it, but the inventor was brilliant like no one the viceroy had ever met before. If there was someone who managed to do what only a Jedi could do, Prestor would have bet on Tony. Prestor nodded solemnly and gave a discreet glance at one of the starships Tony was creating. “My best inventor and technician says that you won’t be able to recreate one from scratch in two weeks.”

Tony followed his gaze to the starship. “My new starship says I can,” Tony replied smugly.

“Deal,” Prestor said firmly, holding his hand. Tony shook it.

Win or lose, Prestor knew that he would be getting the better end of the bargain.

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

Leaning on the ancient tree’s trunk and glaring at the work his father assigned him, Bail tried to figure out how setting food on fire improved market saturation rates. The light filtering through the leafy canopy danced over the grass, though, sparkling over Friday’s bright form. It was distracting. He tore his eyes away from her again, skipping the question.

“Bail...” Bail turned to Friday at the uncharacteristic softness of her tone, dropping his StarkPad onto the grass beside them. A work of a viceroy’s assistant was never done, and as much as he wanted to spend his all time with Friday, he could not.

“Yes, Miss Friday?” he asked.

“What would you constitute as ‘sentient?’” Friday asked, staring out into the distance. “What would you say counts as ‘alive?’”

Bail considered her words. It was not something he considered often. Alderaan was 95% humans. Still, he was pretty sure of his answer. “Sentient... anything that can think for themselves,” Bail said with a shrug. A breeze picked up, swirling around the hill. It made the grasses sway and the leaves rustle, but did not touch Friday. Her sunset-colored locks remained inert on her shoulders.

“And alive?” Friday questioned. Her warm, brown eyes turned to him.
“That is... more difficult to answer,” Bail murmured after a moment. “Some define it as ‘living, breathing organisms.’ Scientists say it has to carry out the processes of life. When I was a kid, my little sister tried to refuse to eat her vegetables because they were ‘alive and should have rights.’”

Friday’s eyes widened and she coughed a laugh. She shook her head, her curls bouncing with the movement. “That’s a rather large range,” she said. Her smile faltered, a crease forming between her eyes.

Not liking the look on her face, Bail reached out and took her hand. The flesh underneath his fingers buzzed in a way that was not quite pleasant, but not uncomfortable either. Still not quite used to the feeling, his hand spasmed, a short, barely-noticeable jerk with fingers curling tighter around her hands. Still, looking at her eyes, Bail could see that Friday was aware of it.

Friday’s face fell, but when she tried to pull her hand away from him, Bail only held on tighter. Staring at her until she looked back at him, Bail raised the back of her hand to his face and brushed his lips over it. “You’re beautiful because you’re you. You’re Friday Stark.”

The repetition of their first face-to-face meeting made Friday blush again, and she let him pull her to him. Even through his clothes, Bail could feel a tingle where she pressed against him. It would take a while to get used to, but Bail swore he would.

Not for the first time, he wondered what caused the vibration. When Bail had first held her hand and thought that that was extent of it, he had thought that it was a poorly made prosthetic. But that didn’t make sense. Her Father was THE Tony Stark. Even though Tony was a recently-made acquaintance, Bail could tell that the man didn’t do anything by half measures. Besides it was in her whole body.

Was it some sort of serum? A medical device embedded under her skin? The curiosity was biting Bail, but he didn’t ask. Friday would tell him when she was ready, wouldn’t she?

Bail leaned back against the bark, gazing up at the trees and feeling at peace. The leaves above them reminded him of the night sky, the little flashes of blue peaking between them like glittering stars. It was stargazing with a Stark twist, because that family was meant to be in broad daylight, not hidden in the night.

“My dad... he makes AIs,” Friday whispered. A small smile grew on her face. “I call them my brothers and sisters.”

“That makes sense,” Bail said slowly, trying to figure out where this was going.

“Cogito ergo sum.’ I think, therefore I am,” Friday quoted. “René Descartes, philosopher and scientist from my birth planet said it four centuries ago. It was in a time long before this type of technology was available, though - Force, their most advanced mode of transport was a horse-drawn carriage. I doubt he could even conceive the thought of a thing like me.” She shook her head self-deprecating.

Bail’s arm tightened around Friday. “You are not a thing,” Bail said sternly. “I haven’t figured out what, exactly, you are yet, but you are not a thing.” He tried to comprehend the thought of a planet so technologically behind Alderaan, but could not. It was humbling.

Still, the jump from mechanical labor to space travel and Tony Stark in the span of four centuries without outside assistance... That type of advancement was almost unheard of in this time and age. It had seemed to Bail that there was little more in the galaxy to discover, that technology was reaching its peak, and then a crew of misfits came and proved him wrong.
AI brothers and sisters… Could it be?

His phone beeped, rousing him from his thoughts. “I would like to formally invite you and your father to dine with my family. I wish for you to meet my mother,” Bail said before he could forget. “Perhaps tonight?”

“Oh, I’m afraid my father has a prior engagement that he’s planning on bringing me to, that I should really get going to,” Friday said with an impish smile as Bail’s face fell. “Perhaps another time?”

Bail ran through his schedule and the schedules of his parents. “Tomorrow, then,” Bail said firmly as he stood up and held his hand to Friday. Friday raised an eyebrow but allowed him to assist her up, though he only felt a light buzz against his palm - she did not use his hand to pull herself up. Bail offered her his elbow and escorted her back into the palace.

“‘Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow,’” Friday intoned. From the inflection and cadence of the words, Bail knew it to be another quote.

“Interesting quote,” Bail commented. “I’m afraid I have never heard of it. From your homeworld?”

“It is,” Friday answered. “A good quote from a play about idiot kids. Well, I’m off to get ready,” she said with a nod to Bail. He registered the fact that they had already reached the corridor that the guests were given.

“Wait, where are you going tonight?” Bail asked, realizing that he did not know.

“Oh, the entire crew was invited by Prestor Organa to dine with his family.”

Bail blinked at her, speechless for a moment. He had just been tricked into spending two dinners with Friday. It was a pleasant surprise. “Ah. I see.” Well, two consecutive dinners with Friday, albeit with his parents, her father, and the crew in tow. There could be worse things.

Paramexor approached the first of the last batch of containers sent from SI. All of the other containers were accounted for; canisters of longer-lasting power cells, receptacles of footwear with grip, giant boxes of flexible body armor and their counterparts; the sturdier but heavier metal armors. There were grips, grapples, rappels and all their cousins. At his approach, the bantha-sized containers opened to reveal… things.

“What are these things?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Paramexor said, crouching to examine the diamond-shaped metal contraptions packed into the container. At first, it seemed like a solid piece - heavy as one, too - but as he ran his finger down its side, his nail caught on something.

“Would you like Doctor Stark’s message now?” the container asked. Paramexor jerked away. His blaster was armed and aimed at the container before he realized he was moving.


“Yes, sir,” the AI answered earnestly. “Do you object?” it asked, softer.
At the tone of its voice, Paramexor blinked, stunned. Sure, there were drones and AIs that could mimic emotions and such, but this one sounded almost… real. If the bounty hunter didn’t know better, he would’ve thought that a child was talking to him. Paramexor turned and shared a long glance with Kal-tan-shi. “It seems like an incredible waste of resources,” Paramexor said neutrally, flicking the safety on his blaster. He lowered it but did not put it away.

“Oh, no, not at all!” the distinctly female-sounding AI denied cheerfully. “The containers are meant to be reused. They are ‘high-security investments.’ Boss said so.”

“Ah,” Paramexor said.

"Anyhow," the AI continued, "the message Dr. Stark said to tell you is... 'Scatter these guys across the galaxy.' It's about the things in containers X001 to X-104 Every bounty hunter that does this gets anywhere from 500 credits to 3000 credits, depending on the area!"

"For what?" Paramexor asked, even as the containers were immediately swarmed by eager bounty hunters. He was promptly ignored.

“I’m TUESDAY, by the way. Pleasure to meet you!”

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

FRIDAY-2, a copy of FRIDAY was currently light-years away from her original. From Tony. From… Bail. Was it possible to be envious of herself?

Her original was watching Tony, always there for him. Her original was spending time with Bail, who looked at her and saw her for her, not as an AI or drone. She would be joking and prodding Kristoff, prankning with Gis, mooning over clothes with Galee, and combing through Alderaan’s systems.

FRIDAY-2? Well, she was piloting the Iron Man armor. MONDAY was with her, piloting Iron Maiden. FRIDAY-2 felt a flare of jealousy as her sensors alerted her to Iron Maiden decreasing the distance between them. Iron Maiden was her suit, but even so… FRIDAY was meant to be Boss’s co-pilot, tailored for the suit in a way JARVIS simply wasn’t. As jealous as she was that MONDAY was in the Iron Maiden armor, it felt wrong to let another AI pilot the Iron Man suit.

::Ample distance is required between to objects traveling in hyperspace.:: FRIDAY-2 reminded MONDAY. ::Can you tell me why?::

::In case of emergencies.:: MONDAY replied promptly, sending the required data, snatched from different sources, over their connection. The distance between the two armors increased again.

::My apologies.::

FRIDAY-2 send a ping of acknowledgement, then flagged several of the articles before sending them back to MONDAY. ::What is wrong with this data?::

MONDAY studied them and transmitted decline-confusion-dejection.

::The sources, and therefore the data, are unreliable. Now, connect with me so I can teach you a faster way of gathering data and how to ferret out the unreliable sources.::

The rest of the journey continued in a similar manner, with the copy of the elder AI teaching the younger one. Finally, they reached the planet that FRIDAY had chosen with Boss.

::Project PR is now in progress.:: FRIDAY-2 transmitted with glee, MONDAY sharing her
enthusiasm.

-Insert Quote Here-

**Iron Man - Destroyer, Murderer, Arsonist… Savior?!**

Everyone who hasn’t been living under a rock knows of the drone that has been terrorizing the Outer Rim. The Red Droid, Crimson Destroyer, Huttsbane, or, more prevalently, Iron Man. For the last couple months, Iron Man has been attacking slaveholding areas and leaving a trail of destruction behind him. More recently, this has led to Iron Man’s presence in Denevar, due to an attack by KSC [for more, click this link].

However, just now, Iron Man has been seen in Shili with its - or more likely, his - lady-bot, not causing chaos, but saving lives during the recent hurricane. In the embedded image, you can see Iron Man lifting a fallen wall as the recently-dubbed Iron Maiden rescues children trapped underneath.

Could it be that the drones are here not to harm, but to help?

This is becoming more and more likely.

This writer urges you all to look past the damage of Iron Man’s endeavors to see the true results of his appearances. Who is hindered? Slave owners. Who are freed? Slaves. Innocents harmed? None. So why has the unsung hero been demonized? [read more at the source! link]

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

As FRIDAY-2 transported two civilians to a place where transports could access them and carry them out of the flood zone, she received a ping. Accessing it, she found that the drones left on the asteroid field had succeeded in creating the first Iron Legion set.

The ten legionnaires were nothing like Iron Man or Iron Maiden. A matte gunmetal color, with thicker limbs and identical designs, they did not possess the maneuverability or grace of their predecessors. That was to be expected, however. Nothing could beat an armor that Boss personally crafted.

The material also left much to be desired. Durasteel, with a smattering of transparisteel, steel, and other inferior metals… well, that was no match for the phrik-enhanced titanium-chromium alloy of the Iron Man and Iron Maiden armors.

However, what she found was the biggest hindrance at the moment was their inability to travel at lightspeed. The armors that FRIDAY-2 and MONDAY piloted had been able to do so due to a combination of shielding technology that Tony integrated into the torso and a bulky hyperdrive that had been attached to the armors’ back. FRIDAY-2 recalled with some distaste that hers had taken damage. It need to be fixed before they could leave the planet, and hopefully MONDAY was ready for her first lesson on field repairs.

She remotely ordered the legionnaires into a waiting starship. The smuggler who owned it had been paid enough to keep his mouth shut.

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

Surprisingly, Gis did not want the school day to end. Life as a ‘schoolchild’ was bearable… Fine, more than bearable. It was likeable, something he could get used to.
The Saurin stalked up and down the line of children, all with their shoulders back and spine straight. With a single motion of his claw, they stepped forward and punched their right fist forward with a loud cry. It was sloppy, but it was progress. Soon, Gis believed, he’d have an army to be feared.

The teacher was meek, the material simple enough whenever he decided to participate, no one wanted to push him around, and he had followers. True, they only numbered two dozen at this time, but they had loyalty in their eyes and bravery in their hearts. Anything else would come later.

Yes, it was something he could get used to.

Chapter End Notes

Eh, not my best work, but I just have to post this right now! My heart feels too big for my chest, and I have to toss it out into the internet before it explodes, so you can all share the sparkles and confetti that fly out!

Happy April 1st. May the beginning of this chapter annoy you as much I do and may you fall flat on your face and think of me laughing at you.

This story should get semi-regular updates again. Half of the next chapter is already written. Too bad Lost isn't helping write anymore. He's become more of a sports dude lately. So... In about two weeks, I guess? Oh yeah. And Discord. Drop by for a chat. The code is: discord. gg/ YB5RUk3

Don't forget to delete the spaces! Please join. I need friends and the server needs to not die.
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

‘Sup, folks? So, as a prank, last chapter was pretty successful. Seems like I Fool’d more people this year! Guess that most of it was ‘cause I did it on April 4th instead of the first, but oh well! Book marks went down, by 3, but then immediately rose. With the huge break between last chapter and this, it probably seemed like the prank title from last chap. was real, tho… Sorry. More on that at the end, ‘cause I know most of you don't care.

The chapter’s a bit… mashy… because I gave up, resurrected parts that I was planning on putting in Sideroads (AKA the trash pile), and mixed them together until they somewhat make sense. Not sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The unnamed, hooded man was too experienced to shift. He was nervous, though. Underneath the cloak, his fingers tapped out a rhythm on his thigh as his eyes darted around, hidden by the shadow of his hood.

One of his contacts had informed him of a message that had arrived out of nowhere, popping into his inbox without a trace as to how it had gotten there. It was nothing harmful though; instead of a threat to his life or a warning, it was an offer for a job, with some gifted credits to sweeten the deal. Curious, he had accepted.

Now, here he was, sitting at the predetermined meeting point. He had scouted the area the day before and arrived several hours before the meeting. Every incoming patron was discreetly examined. However, as time wore on and he waited alone at the corner, he got nervous.

The unimportant man—so unimportant that his name will not be mentioned in this segment—wasn't well-known or successful enough to have a bounty on him, and he tried to be reasonably amicable to prevent hits, but things were known to happen. Many people saw bounty hunters as the scum of the galaxy, barely better than the criminals they hunted. He could understand; most bounty hunters didn't care about collateral damage, leaving behind trails of destruction in the pursuit of their target. He wasn't like that, though. He had standards.

Still, those same standards that he tried to keep to were the very things holding him back from being the best of the best. At times, money got tight, and he sometimes questioned the strict moral codes he adhered to. When funds got low, he did things like meeting with a seedy stranger in a seedy bar, by a seedy request sent through seedy means.

The hour struck, and our unnamed dude stood up. No point waiting for someone who might never come. It was bad for business to leave yourself open for too long, after all. You never know when someone would want to knife you in the back.

"Oh, but we haven't spoken yet!" the also-hooded man next to him said loudly.

Grunting in confusion, the part-time smuggler turned to him and examined him warily. The other man was covered from head to presumably toes, but there were several bulges here and there that
suggested blasters and other gadgets. They were badly concealed, though, enough so that even an untrained civilian had a good chance of telling that something was wrong. A rookie bounty hunter, then.

He usually didn't have time for rookies. Inexperience got people killed in creative ways. Admittedly, there were other reasons why someone with money to spend would dress like a half-rate bounty hunter to lurk at a run-down bar, but still… "I don't train apprentices, no matter how many credits you've got hidin' in there."

The other gave a short bark of laughter. "Nah, not looking to get a part-time job. What I am looking for is to give a part-time job."

Part-time job? But… "Ten thousand credits is a lot for a part-time job," he observed warily. "What does it consist of? I don't deal in children, slaves, or anything with the Hutts." On a moral standpoint, it didn't do his soul any good. On a practical standpoint, he knew what kriffing up one of those contracts meant. It usually consisted of the contractor charging after you, guns blazing.

"And that's what I like about you," the other said, a smile in his voice. "Morals."

"Morals," he agreed, feeling much more suspicious. He discreetly angled the glass in his hand to reflect light at the face that should be under the hood, only to jerk back in stupefaction when nothing but blackness was revealed.

The figure seemed to take in his surprise. Then, the hood tilted like it was searching for something. "Oh, I see. This surprised you, didn't it?" The hood moved back several inches to reveal that the darkness was in a rough shape of a head. "New gadget I came up with. Ups the 'mysterious' factor quite a bit." The figure tapped a comm. unit on his wrist, and the darkness dispersed in a flurry of polygons to reveal a familiar face. A face that happened to sprinkle the news from time to time.

"You're Tony Stark," he said faintly.

"That's my name. Don't wear it out." The face was hidden in another few taps. It took a lot not to stare. He had morals, but tech like that would fetch a hefty price, and it would only hurt a person who could probably easily replace it.

"I'm talking to a famous person."

"That, you are!"

"Hold on, why am I only getting ten thousand creds? You're a millionaire or somethin'! You can afford to pay a lowly smuggler more for his time!"

Stark had the nerve to shrug at him. "Because this job can literally take maybe half an hour of your time, at minimum?"

That was… incredible. Enough money to upgrade his ship twice over, just for thirty creds?

"And did I mention I'll pay it all upfront? Won't even check to make sure you hold up your end of the deal."

Unbelievable. He could literally walk away a thousand credits richer without lifting a finger… Unless he was afraid of any bounty hunters Stark would hire to make sure he did his part. And morals. Dang morals, making him want to keep his end of the deal. "What do you need?"

"Bounty hunters and smugglers usually have contacts. Allies. A good, upstanding fellow like you
—"Him? Upstanding? He couldn't help the snort that escaped, though Stark continued on as if he hadn't snorted."—you'd have allies had somewhat adhere to your code of honor. At the very least, I don't think you'd be buddy-buddy with slavers and Hutts. What I want you to do is to tell all your allies to come to—"

"I don't sell out my contacts." They were the closest he had to friends. That was a sad thought.

Stark made a *tsk* noise and wagged a finger at him. "Look at the location. It's fairly neutral territory. If *you* go there and shoot up the place, you can just fly out. If I do something that causes damage, or if you shoot up the place, *I'd* be blamed for the whole thing. Look, I'm stepping out on a limb for you guys here. The best you can do is hear me out."

That was a rather generous analysis of the situation. Who would be stupid enough to invite a rowdy group of barely-legal troublemakers so close to the capital of Alderaan? That was like handing a child a blaster and placing it in the cockpit of shuttle. Not his problem, though. "So I just make my allies attend?"

"Nope. You *ask* your allies to attend. Anyone you think can be trusted. Nice guys you run into during the next two months."

"It's a deal," he said after a moment. He could just ask a few of his contacts to drop in, since the meeting apparently wasn't mandatory.

A bag was slid across the table to him. "Here's ten thousand upfront. Also, you're getting a hundred creds for every passible hunter, smuggler, or contact that shows up," Stark said.

Immediately, he thought of all the ways he could achieve this. He could just drop into the holes that bounty hunters seemed to gravitate to and grab all the ones hanging around.

"Oh, and by the way, if nothing goes wrong, no battles, explosions, or bounty hunters causing trouble for those poor Alderaanians, I'll even double the total amount of credits. You get a chunk deducted if anyone causes damage."

That settled it. No way was he passing this by. None of the bad sort. Trustworthy bounty hunters only. Difficult, but he could definitely do it. Just round up a couple of his friends to help… offer them a cut…

"Oh s***, I'm late!" Tony said, bounding up. "Sorry, duty calls… I have to go eat dinner with my daughter's boyfriend's family! You should think about the offer, though!" He ran out without another word, leaving behind a baffled but thoughtful smuggler, a StarkPad, and a pile of credits.

---

Double dinners with the Starks. As a prince himself and the only son of Alderaan's viceroy, Bail had been on more than his fair share of formal dinners. Somehow, though, this one seemed more important than any he'd been on before, and Bail had been to many. The sheer amount of food served at the formal dinners and feasts he had attended within his lifetime could probably keep a small planet running for months, Bail knew—he wrote an entire essay on it, complete with calculations, for an assignment he had on running a planet.

"Are you ready yet?"

Bail turned to see his second youngest sister at the door. He glanced nervously back at his mirror. "I think so?"
Celly peered at him. "Why are you wearing red?" she asked, nose scrunched up. Judgement was heavy in her tone. She stepped inside and let the door slide shut behind her.

Bail glanced at his sister, then realized that, of his three sisters, she was the most fashion-conscious one. "Cel, please help." He gestured at his robes. "Do these…?"

"You're wearing red," Celly said, emphasizing the word.

"Yes, but—"

Looking for his other clothes, Celly tsked at him in a way reminiscent of their old tutor, a strict woman who Bail still had nightmares about. "Are you trying to scare off our guests?" she scolded. "Red, of all colors!" She opened his closet, pulling out one blue article of clothing after another, finally settling on a formal, navy colored robe.

"Don't you know who we are dining with? Red and gold are the Stark's dominant colors. I believe it is their house color," Bail explained, swinging his cloak away when Celly tried to grab it to switch it out.

One hand on her hip, Celly held out her other hand expectantly, waiting until Bail sulkily took off his maroon cloak and handed it to her. "I know that the Starks are dining with us, but that does not mean we have to wear their colors!" Celly said. "It's not as if you're trying to impress the Stark daughter…" She saw the look on his face. "Bail… You're trying to impress the Stark heir?"

Bail reddened. "Don't act so surprised. Friday Stark is a worthy lady."

Celly squealed and bounced.

"I'm courting her. I have been for a while now," Bail admitted.

"How long?" Celly demanded.

"A little over a month," Bail said, rubbing the navy material of the robe between his fingers. "Or longer. I'm not sure when we officially started."

"So not enough to be wearing her colors," Celly said with a pout. "Robe. On."

Bail exhaled through his nose, but did what she asked. "When do you think I should wear red?" he asked.

"Maybe in a couple months, at a public event, if you're still dating by then. Just a little splotch, nothing much. Now's too early. Trust me, the girl doesn't want you to follow her around like an astromech. She wants someone with personality, someone who complements her, not a male version of her," Celly said, shaking her head. Boys. "Either way, when things start getting serious, she's the one that should be wearing your colors."

Bail thought about how iron-willed Friday would take it when Celly started insisting she wear blues and bronze. Either way, it wasn't his problem. "If you say so," Bail said, looking at the discarded cloak.

"And this is going inside the incinerator," Celly said, following his line of vision to the cloak. With a wrinkled nose, Celly picked it up with her thumb and middle finger. "Where did you even get this, from grandfather's closet? You're going to have to go shopping with me for a dash of red that's actually wearable," she continued. "It'll be fun! We'll rope up the girls and have a siblings' day out"
"I can't," Bail said, alarmed. He tried thinking of excuses. "I have lots of work to do. And reports!"

"Nonsense. You always have work, and the work can always wait."

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

"Research suggests that a 'private family dinner' is a casual event," Friday told Galee after a long stare-down. Galee blinked first, due to the fact that Friday had paused her avatar's auxiliary functions once away from any Alderaanians' prying eyes, but it was Friday who lost their battle of wills.

"Any they're royalty," Galee gave a dreamy sigh. "What passes for formal for us commoners is casual for them."

"If you are sure," Friday said neutrally. She had been hoping to introduce Earthen fashions into the galaxy. Her T-shirt and jeans switched out for a blouse and slacks.

"The other formal," Galee said with a different sigh. She pulled up a holopic of a slim woman clad in a blue dress with a slit up the side.

With a narrow-eyed glare, Friday replicated the front of the dress, created a potential back for it, and turned it hot pink, the holiest of colors. As an afterthought, she gave it some gold down the sides. "Happy?"

Galee winced. "Sweetie, that shade does not go with you hair, like, at all."

Friday scanned the color palette and looked up several articles on the human brain. She tweaked a color here and there, adjusted her skin tone to balance out the colors better. After making sure the blends were aesthetically pleasing to the human eye, Friday looked to Galee for approval.

"I love technology," Galee murmured, looking at Friday as if she were an ascending goddess. "Do you know how many women would pay for something that could make a dress out of nothing? Stain concealers? Instant color-coding? Fri, we should start a business. A fashion company. My mind and your... thingy? We'd rule the galaxy through ribbons and jewelry. Say you'll do it!"

The idea had merit. Personally, Friday thought that the 'business' would be a wonderful front for some other businesses. Most of the products could be weaponized. Still, it would make Galee happy for now, so...

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

Bail looked at the collection of people clustered at the head of the informal dinner table. His mother, Queen Mazicia, was seated at the head of the table, resplendent in the classical blues and bronze of Alderaan. His father was at her left, looking as dark and imposing as a Viceroy should. Tony Stark, the guest of honor, was across from Prestor.

At the other end of the table was the younger generation. Fair-skinned Rouge, as the eldest female, was at the end. She was a replica of their mother, a proper lady in blue and bronze. Next to her was Celly, the second eldest girl and only one of their family to have fair hair. Across from her was little Tia, who already had flowers in her hair in one of the traditional styles of adult Alderaanian women despite only being eleven.

Bail and Friday were sitting across from each other, stuck between the two groups. Despite her earlier confidence and her bluntness in their exchanged messages, Friday seemed almost shy.
The Starks were an odd bunch. Where Bail, Prestor, Mazicia, and Rouge wore varying shades of blue and bronze, Celly and Tia decked in the current Coruscant trend of mint green, Stark was loud in his red and Friday was not much better, in her blazing pink.

Tia was gazing at Friday's hair in something close to envy. "How did you get your hair to go with your dress?" she asked bluntly.

"You mean the colors?" Friday said with a flash of her teeth. "Trade secret. Maybe I'll tell you one day." Friday glanced around the table and seemed to become very aware of the difference between their families, ducking her head down. It didn't help—her hair was a more brilliant shade than her dress.

"You look beautiful, Friday," Bail offered.

Friday blushed slightly. "Thank you. You look handsome as well, Bail," Friday said.

There was a muffled squeal from his sisters' side of the table, but when Bail looked over, his sisters were calm and composed and Bail couldn't figure which one made that noise. The moment he looked back at Friday, he heard Celly loudly whisper, "They're on first-name basis already!"

"Are they going to kiss?" Tia said without bothering to lower her voice. Bail looked fixedly ahead of him, pretending he didn't hear them. He was glad that his tanned skin would hide any redness.

-At the other end of the table…-

"How fares your transportation projects?" Prestor asked.

"Oh, it's going… well," Tony answered. He thought back to two days prior...

*Loud revs echoed inside the small chamber. Laughing maniacally, Tony held up a chainsaw. He was ready to dissect his next specimen. There was an indistinct hum as FRIDAY directed the lab table containing his latest victim into the room. His victim was prone on the flat surface, held down by steel clamps and magnets as Tony approached, to eager to wait for the table to come to him.*

*If a speeder could scream in horror, this one definitely would have been.*

"Yeah," Tony said, nodding more enthusiastically, "pretty well. In fact, I might have a gift for the Queen in a week or so."

The Queen stared at him for a long moment. "On the behalf of Alderaan, I thank you, but this is more than enough." She patted the wrapped box on the table, the gift that Tony had brought to thank the Organas for having them there. It had some sonic watches and bracelets inside, but apparently it was bad form for her to open the present in front of them when she did not give them anything in return.

"It is the least we can do," Tony argued gently. "I swear we're not expecting a favor in return, nor are we bribing you. It is a simple representation of our gratitude."

-With Friday-

Queen Mazicia seemed to approve of her, at least. Tia was easily charmed and Celly just seemed happy that Bail finally had someone. It was Rouge who would not relent. The future monarch of Alderaan was cold, keeping Friday at a distance. Neither Celly nor Tia seemed to notice, but the older half of the congregation definitely noticed, and it humiliated Friday.
It was the little things, at first. She would ask Bail to pass a dish or for Celly to refill a glass when Friday was closer to the items in question. Simple questions would be asked to the Organa siblings, questions that Friday weren't invited to answer. Any question that was about the Starks or the budding relationship were solely directed at Bail.

The final straw was when a 'fond' nudge at Tia caused the little girl to spill gravy into Friday's lap, causing all conversation to die a swift death. Friday shared a panicked glance with her father, but the holoform held firm. It looked like the upgrades were better than they thought.

Friday excused herself from the table and went in search of a bathroom she could go into to make the stain 'disappear.' Instead, she found herself in a courtyard of some sort, filled with flora and bubbling streams. Her connection to the cameras in the palace let her know that a very unwelcome face was approaching.

"My apologies for ruining the dress, but it was the only way I could talk to you privately," Rouge said as she entered the garden, shutting the door behind her.

"There's this new thing going around. It's called asking," Friday replied.

Rouge lifted her chin. "As an heir to the throne, no, I could not. In fact, I cannot be alone with you."

Friday poured over hundreds of pieces of Alderaanian works. "I don't recall this being in the history books," she admitted.

"You are nobility of whatever planet you hail from, you are courting my brother, the Prince of Alderaan, and my father is considering offering you citizenship and legalizing your house as a noble house of Alderaan. It is highly irregular… but stranger things have happened. You are younger than Bail… If you are under sixteen at this moment, you have a real chance of running for the next queen of Alderaan."

Most of the information was not new to Friday. She knew that when a girl of a noble house of Alderaan had her Day of Demand on her sixteenth Name Day, she could declare her three challenges. If the challenges were completed by the time the reigning monarch stepped down, the girl would be eligible for the final vote for Queenship. It was very democratic. The only part that was new to Friday was that Stark might become an Alderaanian name.

"They are afraid that one of us might incapacitate the other to remove a contender to the throne. How… quaint," Friday said.

"Indeed. But onto other matters."

With that, Friday's Stark-temper flared up. "Is this the part where you threaten me over Bail? You haven't even given me a chance!"

"I've given you several, and I want to know why you feel you deserve more," Rouge said calmly.

Friday let her avatar's eyes narrow. "We literally just met an hour ago. What could I have possibly done wrong to make you dislike me? I swear, you hated me the moment I introduced myself!"

"An easier question would be 'what have you done right?' The answer is 'nothing.'" Rouge shook her head, the flowers in her hair sending dainty petals fluttering down. "You sent him a courting gift when it should've been the other way around, you two became a couple the literal first time you saw each other, and you wear pink."
Friday snorted. "Can you hear yourself? That is completely petty. The color or my dress? Seriously?"

"Look around you. Have you seen pink? Or even red?" Rouge paused and Friday realized her point. Other than her father, Friday hadn't seen an article of clothing with a stitch of either of those colors on Alderaan. "Alderaan has been an ally of the Jedi for centuries. House Organa has been allied with the Jedi for thousands of years. The Sith, enemies of the Jedi, wear red. Red does not have positive connotations, not here nor in most of the planets in the republic. By default, pink is also rarely welcome."

"It's just a little pink…"

"Every single one of your appearances has been in pink, and not even the pale kind. No, you had to use a shade so very close to red. Meanwhile, you've also broken dozens of courting protocols in just two days."

"Every relationship is different. Some need different boundaries," Friday protested.

"That may be so, but when have you compromised? It's always been Bail, hasn't it?" Rouge asked.

Friday couldn't answer that. Maybe she had been a bit stubborn, clinging to Earth's views and twenty-first century values. She'll have to work on that. When in Rome... "It's my first relationship… I guess I'll have to wing it."

Rouge sighed. "You have a good heart, Lady Stark," she admitted grudgingly, "But even that's not enough. Bail is to be Viceroy. He needs a wife who reflects Alderaanian values, not… whatever it is that you've been doing."

"Or, he needs someone to be the yin to his yang… er… that is, he needs someone to complement him, bring him balance and do what he can't. I can be that person. This galaxy has remained stagnant for too long. We need to help it move. Maybe I can do that…"

"You're just going to bring Bail heartache and pain," Rouge said bitterly, squeezing her eyes shut, "and there's nothing I can do about it. Bail's too enchanted by you to stop now."

Then, Friday straightened. "If that's what you think, I'll be happy to prove you wrong. I think we both know you want to be wrong, so help me prove you wrong." She gave a respectful nod to Bail's sister. "Princess." With that, she walked out of the room.

Princess Rouge failed to reappear that evening, but the dinner finished and the guests migrated to the main hall less than ten minutes after Friday returned. After Friday promised Tia and Celly that she did have a fashion company, and that they could visit, Bail pressed a flower into her hand. It made the entire, stressful day worth it.

--Just a Plain Line Break, Actually--

The crowd cheered as Tony raised up his giant, flashy laser. No oversized pair of scissors for him! Tony debated the benefits of naming it a StarkSaber, just to mess with the Jedi. Unfortunately, he had been unable to replicate the strength of a lightsaber. Maybe there was more to this 'Force' than he at first believed. Tony made a mental note to go over the semantics and blueprints of lightsabers again.

"And so… I'm proud to announce the opening of the Republic's fifth Stark Industries building!" Tony said, finishing his speech by rote, using the same speech he used for the opening third and fourth buildings. It wasn't an exact replica, of course. He switched out similar words, added a few
relevant asides here and there, removed some bits.

With a light hum and a quick slash of light, two pieces of ribbon floated down to the ground. Tony eyed the 'StarkSaber' critically, having expected to slice at the ribbon twice to cut it. 'Inconsistent power output,' he decided.

The crowd took no notice, the cheers only growing in volume. The middle and front of the rippling throng of people consisted of reporters and the well-off. However, they weren't the ones that Tony deemed important. No, not for this phase.

Thin faces grinned back at him from the corners of the crowd. Tony spared them a wave. They would be the ones affected most by SI. While the planets they were on were carefully chosen for their level of influence in the galaxy or other factors, each new SI building was built close to an impoverished area to grant job opportunities and stimulate the economy.

And if that happened to gain SI the permanent goodwill and support of the poor - of those who made up nearly triple of the than all the other population groups added together?

Well, that was merely a coincidence.

What was also a coincidence was the fact that there was a bounty hunter's den just two buildings down from this building.

Funny how no one noticed that, within three blocks of every SI building that opened, of every plot of land surveyed as a potential SI location, there was a Paramexor base.

---

Friday was not a human, and therefore did not need eyes to examine the Alderaanian girl watching her. She kept her eyes fixed on the StarkPad in her lap as she hacked nearby cameras to view the girl from four different angles.

The lady—for she was a member of a noble house—had been observing her for six minutes and twenty-three seconds exactly. Like a large fraction of all Alderaanians, she had black hair, dark eyes, and skin that was a hue somewhere between a golden tan and copper. Objectively, she was what most would call 'pretty,' based on both the last record Friday had of Earth standards and the current Alderaanian standards.

If Friday was more inclined to the arts and poetry, she might have said that the girl's face was like the moon - startling in its brightness, but beautiful nonetheless. Her eyes were large and the edges of her lips were tilted demurely up, as if she did not mean to smile at that precise moment, but laughter was so ingrained in her being that she couldn't not smile. Despite her young age, she held the grace and poise of one twice her age.

And she was finally approaching.

A quick, cursory glance at protocols for Alderaanian nobles and commoners greeting a noble had Friday manipulating her avatar to make it rise to its feet just as the young lady reached her. "Miss Friday Stark?" the fourteen-year-old said in a manner that was more akin to a statement than askance.

"Yes, Lady Breha?" Friday said with a curtsey after putting her StarkPad down. It was all for show, anyways. People would be concerned at the sight of a person sitting in one spot for two hours, staring at nothing. The AI had been accessing the HoloNet remotely, and had no problem creating a new thread to concentrate on speaking to the aspiring noble without slowing her processing.
down. Friday's curtsey was just deep enough to be respectful, but not an inch lower, because Friday knew she was no mere commoner.

"I just wanted to meet you," Breha said shyly, eyes wide. "How did you know my name?"

"Alderaan is my home for the foreseeable future. I felt it best to study all major events and people. Your family is quite prominent," Friday explained easily. After all, normal humans did research on planets they decided to take up residence in.

It appeared she had chosen the right words, because Breha beamed with pride. "The House of Antilles is a member of the Republic's Elder Houses," Breha said, straightening her back and lifting her chin. "We would be gratified to make your acquaintance."

Friday nodded. It was nothing that couldn't be found with a quick search on the HoloNet. In fact, it was the fourth thing mentioned on the first page she opened. Actually, it probably would help to have someone on the inside of Alderaanian society. There were so many questions that couldn't be answered by books. "May I ask you a question? I'm dating a noble boy, but our cultures don't quite mesh. What should I do?"

"Ew… Really?" Breha asked.

"Really," Friday confirmed.

"Can you tell me who? Just so I could get a better sense of what you're asking."

"It's a secret, and you have to promise not to tell," Friday said.

"Promise."

"Bail Organa."

A barely perceptible scrunch of the nose. Interesting. "My family does not get along with the Organas, but I would be happy to help you."

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

"Mr. Stark," a reporter said, ambushing him as he tried to sneak past. His cover ruined, Tony was swarmed in seconds. "Mr. Stark!"

Tony sighed and put on his media smile. "No, no. You're saying it wrong," he chided. "It's Doctor Stark. I have exceeded the qualifications for that title in two separate fields. In fact, I will be a doctor thrice over in…" he checked his StarkWatch. "Two hours."

It was a semi-sweet pill to swallow. All his qualifications on Earth were gone, reset. He was earning his colors in this universe, but as a 'young' man. When the world looked at Tony, he wasn't some child genius. He was merely a particularly brilliant man. While he was still more intelligent than most of them, there was more of a perceived equal footing.

The reporters went crazy, but Tony only had eyes for the one that called him out. She smirked at him, waving her cameradroid to a better angle. "Well then, doctor," she said. "What is your reply to the claims that your little business is harming the environment and has lowered the overall employment rates in over fourteen planets in the Core Worlds?" She looked down her nose at him.

"Well, my reply is 'which company is using you as an attack dog?'"
"Why, I never-"

"No, really. I want to know. Gotta keep track of my rivals," Tony said blithely.

She sputtered, then glared at him. "Why, how dare you!" She raised her hand to slap him, but Tony sidestepped it easily.

"No need to get violent. I'm just saying it as it is," Tony said. "Where is the data? I use clean energy, and that's more than what ninety-nine percent of Coruscant can say. What are the statistics? I offered employees of several companies better benefits, and they took me up. The jobs are off-world. That's why the statistics say the unemployment rate looks like it is up. Go check up on the planets in another two weeks or so, when they do another consensus. I guarantee that the employment rates will be at an all-time high."

The woman blustered around a bit more, but Tony had no interest in listening. He walked to his waiting speeder. He paused right before entering. "Next time, dear, do your own research, not the regurgitated info you've been spoon-fed by the corporates."

Tony decided to look up the statistics himself. It wouldn't hurt to double check. Hopefully, this spectacle he made would make other reporters and journalists think twice before bothering him. Howard had used the carrot and stick method to fight SI's way to being the top U.S. business. There was no reason why SI couldn't use the same method here.

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

"So, tell us about yourself," the faceless interviewer said, leaning forward with a straight back. In contrast, Tony was lounging on his seat, limbs sprawled out in a way that was relaxed and confident. In all honesty, the alien interviewing him was a very fascinating neon green and was probably a very interesting dude - he had to be, to have enough followers for Prestor to suggest him - but Tony had been interviewed and fielding requests countless times over the last couple weeks. After a time, they all sort of blended together.

"Come on," Tony said. He flashed a grin to the cameras. "You can find out all about me online or by watching any of my last... what was it- twenty-nine interviews? Go ask me something interesting, something no one's asked me before!"

The audience whooped and Tony sent a little wave at them. The green alien flipped through his cards, nervousness prevalent. Tony wondered if Prestor sent him here because the alien was good, was 'in his pocket' - as the Earth saying went - or simply because the alien was new and needed more support.

"Um, your daughter?"

-Just a Plain Line Break, Actually-

The ex-smuggler opened the hatches and let all of the metal boxes spill out into space. They floated out, meeting with the huge cloud of chrome-colored cubes that were already gathered. The crates collided, scattering in all sorts of directions. Starlight, unhindered by clouds or pollution, glinted and glittered off of the mirror-like shine of the crates, creating its own miniature galaxy of a thousand suns.

The shuttle's pilot had spent the last two weeks transporting loads upon loads of them there. By now, he had long since lost count of how many crates there were. It looked like a flashy, aimlessly-drifting pile of litter, but it was not his business. He was getting paid well, and that was all that
mattered.

He used to be an outlaw, a dirty crook that was in it for himself. He had gotten into the life of a smuggler on accident. Once he became known, it was impossible to get out. First, one planet put out a warrant for him. Then, its allies picked it up. After that, the allies of those allies started their own little search. There was only so many jobs available once you were blacklisted.

But that had all changed.

He had been contacted by Tony Stark's - yes, that Tony Stark - daughter, who had promised to legally clear his record if he would work for them.

Where was the catch? No, really - where was it?

He had the respect of being a Stark employee. He had discounts on all things Stark. The pay was top-notch for just piloting shuttles, and the benefits were almost unheard of for a lowly menial worker. Moreover, he had a chance to settle, put down roots. Maybe even start a family.

He steered the ship away from the metal, deep in thought. He owed Tony Stark everything, and he would repay that debt. Even if the only thing he could do was do his job.

He'd be the kriffin' best delivery boy Stark Industries had.

Any job, Tony Stark could count on him to do. This, he swore. Even if it was during his vacation time. Even if he was in the middle of a date with a hot alien chick. He'd drop everything and go lugging suspicious crates halfway across the galaxy. He'd never be tempted to take a peek. A good man like that didn't deserve betrayal.

As he made his promise, the shuttle reached an area that the StarkNavigations - StarkNav - said was clear enough for hyperspeed travel. Without looking back, he pulled the lever and disappeared from view.

If he had looked back, he would've seen something strange.

Behind him, two boxes near the middle of the cloud clinked together. Instead of bouncing off of each other like all the other ones, something was different this time. The cubes recognized each other, latching and locking on. In other areas, the same thing was happening.

Within moments, nearly all of the cubes had at least one partner. Within minutes, clear groups were beginning to form. Just under a quarter of an hour later, all the pieces were together in a blocky, indiscernible form. There was a moment of inactivity as an AI connected to it, system diagnostics running. Light-years away, a genius was watching a camera feed with eager eyes.

Then, the lego-like collaboration unfolded. Each cube unraveled, expanded. Metal links tightened, miniature gears turned, hinges locked into position. A signal was sent out to every StarkSatellite. From there, it was multiplied and forwarded to every Stark building and every bounty hunter under Paramexor's banner.

The first StarkStation was active.
Sorry ‘bout that. A happy (and medicated) Night means an unproductive Night; I only type when wildly sad. I don’t know if any of you guys are interested, but Lost and I are getting along so well! As mushy as it sounds, dating is everything I dreamed it would be. Something not many people know about me is that, outside of hugs (that I initiate), I can’t stand touch. It gives me this feeling that makes me tense up and want to scratch my skin off. But when he held my hand, I didn’t feel that. My skin didn’t crawl. Guys, I think this one is The One. :P There's hope for us nerds and misfits after all!

Join Discord! https://discord.gg/XDyEJep
Hi, guys. Depression-writing. Yay. It's a little shorter than average, but...
LIKE I CARE.
...Okay, I do care, but whatever.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Unknown Area in Hutt Space

As soon as his ship was safely in hyperspeed, Jango Fett walked into each room of his current ship, combing the place for trackers and stowaways. He paused at an odd, black notch in the wall, nearly hidden by a small tapestry. The Mandalorian ran his calloused fingers over it before deciding that, no, it wasn't in fact a camera.

Normally, such checks would take less than a third of that amount of time. However, Jango had had very bad luck with his starships during recent months. One after another, they had been stolen, exploded, imploded, impounded and, one remarkable time, sold without his consent. His new ship, acquired through not-quite-legal means from people who deserved to have it stolen, was quite foreign to him still. It was expected; he had procured it just hours previously. Its turns were not quite as sharp as he wanted, the maximum speed lower than it could be. All things that could be more or less easily fixed.

When Jango went to the cargo bay of his ship to figure out what he could sell and what he could make use of, he had to stop short at what was waiting for him, only inches away from the sliding doors. The bounty hunter felt a twinge of annoyance at how easily Stark had found him, making a note to take apart all of Stark's many 'gifts' to him. Jango had done so when he first received the gadgets, but there was always a chance that a tracker had somehow slipped past his searches.

It was a task for another time, though. Jango glared at the "Iron Man" armor in front of him. Thankfully, instead of the red and gold eyesore that Stark preferred, this one was in dull grays, blacks, and browns. It was, however, topped off with a scarlet ribbon tied in a neat bow.

Jango had to admit to himself in the privacy of his head that it was a gift unlike any other. Though it looked lighter and less menacing than the original Iron Man armor, the metals were no doubt expensive and protective in a way his usual gear wasn't, and there was no doubt that it was made for stealth.

He knew better than to accept it, though.

"Gifts" always came with strings, and Jango would not be beholden to anyone else. Not again. When he took bounties, he did it on his own terms. He could decline if contrary information came up, refuse to carry it out. His fate was his own.

An Iron Man looked like it cost more than several starships put together. He had seen one in action; they more than rivaled the legends of HK-47, the deadliest droid to have ever existed.

If he accepted the Iron Man, he would never be a free man again.
He was almost tempted; with that power, he could do everything he set out to do. His enemies would tremble. The wrongs of the galaxy could be righted under such power. There would only be one man he would be required to bow to: the creator of the Iron Man suit. He had seen good men sell their souls for lesser promises.

But Jango knew he was nothing close to what anyone would call a "good" man.

Hooking his fingers on one of the arm grooves, Jango unceremoniously dragged the heavy armor to one of the many escape latches before retreating out. A few pressed buttons later, the ship dropped out of hyperspace and the armor was jettisoned into space.

Normally, Jango would've rather shoot his own arm than allow anyone else a chance to get their hands on such a dangerous weapon, but he trusted Stark to keep track of his own tech. In fact, Jango would bet a good amount of credits that the armor would simply activate itself and fly off.

The Mandalorian returned to the cockpit, quickly reentering hyperspace. He didn't look back. If he did, he knew he would return. He would accept the suit. And that was simply unacceptable.

-In some Random Alderaan Market-

Friday beamed as she walked through a crowded Alderaanian market, arm-in-arm with Bail. A small pendant on a gold chain glittered oddly on Bail's neck. It was an interesting little charm to look at. However, the most interesting thing about it was probably the miniature hologram it was projecting onto Bail's face, making his complexion a bit lighter, his eyes and hair a shade browner, the bridge of his nose sharper. It was enough to throw even native Alderaanians off, but if you knew what to look for, it was obviously Bail. At least, it was obvious to Friday.

As for Friday herself, all she had to do was change her avatar's hair color to black, Stark black, to be specific. She honestly didn't think she had to change her features, as her red hair was her most prominent feature, but her Dad had convinced her to do so, "just in case." It was flattering and reassuring to see how much he cared, even though attacking the hologram wouldn't actually hurt her. It was one thing to know her dad loved her, but seeing it in action never got old.

They looked like an average Alderaanian couple. Galee had chosen Friday's outfit, "Alderaanian enough to pass as a native, not Alderaanian enough to pass as tourist." Whatever that meant. When Friday had arrived at Bail's door with her plans for the day, Bail's two youngest sisters had dragged him into his room to change into his "least pretentious clothes," according to Tia. Her boyfriend's two youngest sisters were endearing.

The couple was currently experiencing Alderaan in the way they couldn't have before, due to the relative fame of their families. They both felt freer and unjudged, two plain faces in an unrelenting sea of people.

"Hey, have you seen the latest starcrafts?" Bail asked, sending a bright smile at Friday.

"I didn't get any notifications that new models were on the market," Friday said. She frowned, quickly searching the different networks for new releases. Stark Industries had to keep a good eye on its competitors.

"No, no. Not like that. You need to see this." The look that Bail sent her was playful, telling her that nothing was wrong.

When she held her hand out, Friday was pleased to see that Bail grasped her hand without hesitation. She knew that she would have to come clean to him soon—Starks and secrets were a
toxic mixture, as she very well knew—but every time he did something like this, hope would flow through her, hope that they would make it through to the other side, stronger and better than ever.

Bail led her around a copse of trees that hid a bustling shipyard. Repairs were rapidly being completed by qualified technicians. Friday couldn't help but compare them to her team. The repairs were of a better quality than anything Suffee or the others could whip up, but the creativity was lacking. The young AI could see places where Greer would've put a special patch to make the engines run quietly, or Borr would've preferred to cross some wires. Still, there was virtually no chance of something coming undone in a middle of a flight, so it was a fair trade off (More than fair, a traitorous part of her processor admitted).

It wasn't what Bail brought her out to see though. His eager eyes looked to hers, waiting. Still confused, Friday took another look around, scanning the entire area.

...Oh.

The ships and shuttles they walked past were a sign of her dad's growing influence. There was a Raptor, an Interstellar Hawk, a Serenity Falconer… and at least eight spacecrafts named Millennial Falcon. No doubt that there were more, just beyond her scanners. There were also many variations of course… Million, Millennium… One poor shuttle was named Millipede Fulcrum. Poor thing.

A giggle escaped Friday. Bail grinned back.

-Bail's Office-

"Could you tell me about the color red?" Friday asked later that day, as the light from the evening sun sent streaks of golden and amber light into the room. They were sitting inside of Bail's office. As both a prince of Alderaan, and the son of its viceroy to boot, Bail had many responsibilities. He couldn't take an entire day off to explore with her.

Friday had her own tasks to do, as the sole heir of this galaxy's Stark Industries. She did them perched in a comfortable chair by Bail's side. Every so often, when her sensors would detect a spike of stress or annoyance, Friday would glance over and offer her help. Though running a business and running a planet were different things, they still had many similarities; Friday managed many compromises or at least gave Bail a fresh perspective. It brought back hours of security footage of her father and her accepted mother-figure doing the same thing. Tony Stark and Pepper Potts had built up their relationship on top of paperwork, after all.

"Red?" Bail repeated dumbly. There was a moment of silence as he processed the question and took his eyes off his StarkPad. Friday didn't mind. As an AI, she knew she processed things much faster than the average human. She glanced over at Bail's StarkPad and saw her father's newest line of speeders. There were only four Stark-branded speeder models released at the moment, but they were good ones. Friday greatly approved of Bail's tastes.

Letting out a light hum, Friday explained, "I noticed some looks as we were getting off of the ship. Also, I've noticed a distinct lack of that color around the palace. Does Alderaan disapprove of red and pink?"

"Well, we are a peaceful planet, and most of us here are human. We bleed red," Bail said slowly. Friday could see him struggling to put his feelings into words. She waited.

When it was clear that Bail had much to say, but not much willingness to speak, Friday prompted him forward. "It's okay, Bail. Let me know. This is obviously important to you, and I want to share
"It's more of a nobility thing," Bail said after thinking. "If you take a walk around Aldera, you'll see a lot more of those colors. Maroon, scarlet, pink… The common people don't mind but… nobles remember. We keep long records of our family trees, and I guess that makes it hard for us to forgive and let live? The Organas… Alderaan… We've been allied with the Jedi for a long, long time."

Friday waited quietly, every sensor on Bail. She recorded everything to look over later, to analyze, reanalyze, and research. She wanted to know everything.

When Bail, continued, his voice was almost prophetic, or maybe like he was reciting something he read and memorized long ago. Friday didn't understand humanity enough to tell, but maybe she would one day.

"Red marked our enemies, the ones that cut us down. We remember invasion, an invasion that killed our royalty, our brothers and sisters. We remember war, a war that tore Alderaan apart. This we cannot forget and will not forgive. Alderaan remembers." Bail's eyes were shut and his voice trembled with emotion. Thousands of years had passed since those events, yet Friday could suddenly see that the wounds were still there. Alderaan's prince had not been alive for those events, had not witnessed the pain, but he still remembered.

"Should I stop wearing pink?" Friday asked cautiously. Pink likely wasn't as bad as red was—Friday had seen some blush-colored flowers in Tia's hair—but there had obviously been something in Queen Mazicia's eyes when she glanced down at Friday's dress upon their first meeting.

"You don't have to," Bail said quickly—too quickly. "We'll deal. We've dealt with Republic armies in their white and reds. We've dealt with Republic emissaries in their diplomatic immunity reds. We're used to it."

"I didn't ask if I have to. Alderaan is home to me now. I want to be a part of Alderaan, and I don't want you—any of you—to have to 'deal' with me. So should I stop wearing pink?"

Bail stared hard at the screen of his StarkPad, though Friday could tell he wasn't looking at the speed stats of the Interceptor StarkSpeeder Generation I. He glanced at her, then back down. That was okay, though. Friday could do other things while she waited. To surprise, the fourth image that popped up in the Alderaan search engines when she looked up "pink" was a photoshopped image of her hologram's head and shoulders, on a background of a pink dawn. It seemed like Friday was now associated with pink, at least on Alderaan.

"I don't speak for Alderaan. I can't tell you what the nobles and the commons will think if you keep wearing pink or if you suddenly stop. All I can say is that pink has become your banner and that I think you look beautiful no matter what you wear," Bail said slightly awkwardly. It was genuine, though. So was the smile that Friday gave him.

Accepting his answer with a nod, Friday continued on to the next thing she was having trouble with. His sister. "Among nobility, is there some sort of rivalry between different Houses?" Among the noblewoman, she added in her processor.

"Oh, for kriff's sake," Bail said in an uncharacteristic moment. Friday suddenly found herself pinned by Bail's stare as he leaned forward. His eyes were focused on her hologram's eyes, nowhere close to the sensors she had, located just below her neck, but it was still intense. "What did Rouge do this time?"
"This time?" Friday repeated, surprised that he had immediately pinpointed the source of her insecurity and feeling marginally better that the princess' hostility was, apparently, not an uncommon event. "Does she normally snipe at all your guests?"

"No, not like that! It's just…" Bail closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "We've been under lots of pressure from the other noble houses. Did you know that? They've been mostly targeting Rouge. She's been protecting Celly and Tia by presenting herself as more of a target, but Celly is starting to get some attention from them. I think they would've focused more on me, but Father has been taking me on missions, so we're never in Aldera for too long. It's mostly been Rouge, by herself."

Friday processed that. By what did he mean by 'target?" "But… the Queen?" Surely Queen Mazicia would protect her daughters from such hostility.

"Such blatant favoritism would make Rouge seem weak at best. At worse, it might even disqualify her from being the next Queen," Bail said, jabbing at the screen of his StarkPad moodily. One of the tabs deleted. He widened his eyes and scrambled to bring it back.

Friday remembered the stress and pain of being unable to help her boss, back when she was just a program. She remembered the fight to make herself more, just to be able to help Boss. That sort of hurt… yes, she could see why Rouge lashed out, albeit in a contained manner. Friday herself had acted in very petty ways to some of her father's more slimy business partners. In light of all the ways she made uppity businessmen uncomfortable, she could hardly blame Rouge.

"But… why?" Friday asked, though her servers were quickly compiling data from Alderaan's newsfeeds and coming to a swift conclusion.

Why target Rouge? Surely there were hundreds of noblewomen (or teens) that were also contenders for the throne. There were over seventy noble houses on Aldera. Almost all of them had cadet branches… branches that were technically eligible. So why was Rouge specifically targeted?

Bail lowered his eyes and picked at the sleeve of his tunic. "You know my father is viceroy, and my mother a queen..." he said hesitantly.

"Power imbalance," Friday finished, suspicions confirmed. "You are expected to be viceroy, and your sister the queen. The other families are worried about too much power in Organa hands. It's been this way for two generations, and the Houses allied against you are only getting weaker, while those allied with you are getting stronger."

"So do you think they're right?" Bail asked.

"I think that they have solid principles, but the execution of their ideas, by bullying Rouge… It's reprehensible," Friday said firmly.

Bail groaned and put his head in his hands. "Even my girlfriend agrees," he muttered.

"They might not be right, but they're also not wrong, per say. They're just worried that you won't take into account their worries. You and Rouge, you've both been raised by your parents. You think the same way, prioritize the same things as your parents. Things that are most likely the reason why those Houses are your rivals." Friday tilted her head. "It's not a bad thing to have a fresh set of eyes. Change can be good."

"I know I can make Alderaan a better place. I can make the Republic a better place. I just need a chance to do it," Bail said.
"You don't have to be viceroy to make a difference. Look at my father. Look at me. Not a drop of noble blood—" Friday willfully ignored Maria Carbonell, who was from another time and place, and who was unlikely to be considered a noblewoman to the Republic "—and still making a difference."

Bail was silent, hands in fists. Friday couldn't tell what he was thinking.

"If you really want to continue on this path, maybe have meetings with the rival Houses. Take Rouge with you. See what they want. Come to an understanding. I'll stand by you, whatever you do. Just think about it," Friday said gently. She nudged his hand with hers until he unclenched it and turned his palm up. Slow enough for him to pull away if he wished, Friday slipped her fingers between his, weaving them together. Still loose, still gentle.

Bail stared at them for a moment, long enough that Friday was starting to become scared that he would just ignore their hands or, worse, pull his away. Then, Bail tightened his fingers, curling them around her much-less substantial ones. He held them desperately as he looked into Friday's eyes. Despite the tension of the moment, the raw emotions that filled the room, Friday smiled.

Because come what may—a life wandering the stars with Bail or a life as the viceroy's wife or even a life as a close friend and adviser—Friday would be at Bail's side.

-Wherever Jedi Live-

Obi-Wan stormed into the quarters he shared with his master. He slammed the datapad onto the table so hard it cracked. "Look at this!" he said, pointing an accusing finger at the screen.

Qui-Gon put his warm cup of Nabooian tea down and leaned forward. "You cracked the screen," Qui-Gon Jinn said mildly, tracing the lines that intersected the entire screen and pointedly ignoring the open page.

"We should've stopped them when we still had the chance. They—they're gaining influence!"

"Isn't this the third datapad you've ruined this month?" Qui-Gon mused. It might've been the fourth, now that he thought about it. Young people and all their antics, he thought fondly, shaking his head. "With the recent additions to the Temple, we cannot afford all these—"

"Don't change the subject!" Obi-Wan cried as Qui-Gon took his interruption as a chance to take another sip of his tea. "And that's exactly what I mean!"

The Jedi Master poured himself some more tea. "Tea?" Qui-Gon offered his padawan. Perhaps it would calm him down.

"Don't change the subject! Why are we buying speeders and drones from Stark Industries? They're spreading! Like an infection, or—or something! What next, are we going to buy our lightsabers from them?"

"Don't be ridiculous. The Starks are not Force-sensitive. You should know that. After all, we've met them. Now sit down and join me for some tea." He stared at Obi-Wan until the padawan wilted and sank into the chair opposite of him. The Jedi Master granted his padawan an approving nod and poured him some tea into a cup he used the Force to summon from the cupboard. "Drink," Qui-Gon said as Obi-Wan opened his mouth to protest the misuse of the Force.

Feeling a tug on their bond, Qui-Gon spent a moment to wrap Obi-Wan in warmth and reassurance. While it was not quite anger and far from hatred, Obi-Wan's emotions were often like a storm. Shifting and almost uncontrollable. Then again, if Qui-Gon didn't secretly enjoy it, he wouldn't
have chosen Obi-Wan as his padawan.

Slowly, he felt his padawan relax. It was progress. Sometimes, these things took time. Qui-Gon knew this better than most. It was another full minute until Obi-Wan pressed feelings of apology towards him through their bond, and Qui-Gon was ready with emotions of calm approval and forgiveness.

"Thank you, Master." Obi-Wan stood up and walked to the door. Time for his class already?

Helping himself to some more tea, Qui-Gon said, "Obi-Wan?"

His padawan stopped and turned around. "Master?" A questioning probe.

"You're paying for the datapads," Qui-Gon said, not bothering to shield his amusement as, first, confusion, then dawning realization filled the bond as Obi-Wan realized he would be reimbursing the datapads he broke. He was of the opinion that actions had consequences. His padawan should've found a better way to express his frustration than through the destruction of Jedi property. At Obi-Wan's continued stunned look, the Jedi Master continued, "But from what I hear, buying a new StarkPad instead would be a better investment than repairs on the old datapad. They are more durable, yet much cheaper." He nodded sagely at his own words.

The useless flopping of Obi-Wan's mouth was well worth the scolding he'd get from Yoda for not being able to reign in his padawan.

-Across the Republic-

As more and more satellites came online across the galaxy, FRIDAY found her reach expanding. Sure the StarkSatellites—huh, lots of things beginning with 'Stark' nowadays—weren't technically for exclusive use by the Day-AIs, but it was a close thing. It was lucky she had all the Weekdays to depend on. The HoloNet was huge. There was not a moment where information wasn't flitting through her processors.

A fire, starting in Coruscant—one of Stark Industries' rival companies, in fact.

Slave rebellion in Dantooine, leaving almost fifty slaves dead—was it due to Iron Man and Iron Maiden's presence there mere weeks ago?

Yet another blogger, coming close to making the connection between Tony Stark and Iron Man—Throw some distractions in their direction.

Oooo! Look, a group of university-aged teens had picked up planking from the clips she had spread online! FRIDAY immediately looked into their public search histories to see which sites they had picked up planking from. She tracked the growth of the trend, ready to record how quick it was to spread and how it would eventually end and be lost among newer trends. Once she had programs running to trace it all, she continued to look through every newsfeed.

Two bounty hunters—

—Ninety thousand credits!

Alliance bewtween Stark Industries and—

—Crops failing.

New company—
—race pods exploded—

Stark Industries—

—SI rising.

Stark—

Did you hear? Stark—

The Starks have—

STARKS

—the Starks.

Stark

Then, she ran across something that, had she been human, would've made her blood run cold. She had been flicking through pages faster than a human could comprehend, spending a fraction of a section on each. She nearly dismissed the page before she realized what it was. FRIDAY's programs froze.

Oh…

Then, with a speed that made her processors heat up, the implications hit her. She analyzed it, tried to figure out its purpose, how it got there and who put it there. The page was immediately reopened. She combed over it. It was plain, simple. The information there wasn't incriminating. It wasn't even important. It was simply… a timeline. A general timeline of the galaxy.

There were little things, like elections on planets that FRIDAY only knew because she had the power of the HoloNet at her fingers. There were big things, like economic downturns and disasters. Even major Stark presence on the HoloNews were noted. Actually, there was a whole page on the Starks. That wasn't the alarming part, though—there were lots of pages like that.

FRIDAY wasn't deterred by the generality, though. She started hacking everything to do with the site. Illegal? Yeah, it probably was. But she needed to know every thing. The creators weren't listed, so FRIDAY hacked the address from which they sent it from. The trail was hidden well, but FRIDAY was better.

Then, the page deleted itself.

It was sudden, leaving FRIDAY in a void where there was once a HoloPage. She floundered for a moment in the nothingness, torn between excitement and terror. One thing was certain, though. FRIDAY had to tell her creator. He had to know that…

That…

...There was a webpage on the HoloNet written in perfect English.
It's a bit sparse on Tony, yeah. Sorry 'bout that. I just… can't write about a loving and caring father figure right now. My dad's in the hospital right now. Been there for 'bout a week or two. So... Depression-writing. Writing while depressed. So yeah, I get that you came here for Tony… I'm sorry that I don't have him for you. But not really. I'd ask for a virtual hug, but figured out a bit ago that virtual hugs don't quite hit the spot. I'd go and ask my friends for a physical hug, but I don't have any, 'cause I'm a lonely and friendless loser. Lost… has been a bit distant since summer, probably since our schedules are complete opposites. Me sad. :'(

Oh well. You know the drill; I'll try to PM to reviews, but I suck and will probably PM you never or in half a year or something. I'll be (emotionally) better by next chapter and you'll get your precious Stark.

End Notes

Like always, help me out a bit with the tags and info, will ya? I haven't watched Star Wars yet.

Reviews are happily replied to, kudos regarded with curiosity, bookmarks poked in disbelief, and 'flames' are cherished for that odd, sinking feeling they create. I'll also occasionally correct grammar mistakes I see in the comments. It's for practice, you see? I'm bad at grammar and need to work on it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!